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Differences in Remedial Pedagogy Approaches between Teachers and Students

Jessica Accurso-Salguero

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Seton Hall University
2016

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, **Jessica Accurso-Salguero**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ph.D.** during this **Spring Semester 2016**.

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Abstract

This study determined and assessed the perceptions of both students and teachers on the best approaches to remedial education. Although much of the research in the remedial education field has used quantitative approaches to determine the impact of taking remedial classes on academic outcomes, qualitative research has been less extensively used but offers a better understanding of why students do not remediate successfully. While remedial programs work well when students successfully complete remedial courses, students often fail to complete them. Therefore, it is important to understand why remedial programs sometimes succeed but so often fail. Based on the Grubb and Gabriner (2013) triangle of instruction and modifying this triangle in the context of research by Cox (2009) and Jenkins (2011), this qualitative study sought to develop an understanding of students' taking remedial courses and teachers' perspectives on teaching remedial courses by taking a multipronged data collection approach. The research questions in this study were used to determine how faculty and students describe the effective teaching methods conducive to successful student learning. This case-study approach included classroom-based observations of teaching methods, student attitudes, and interviews of both teachers and students. The interview topics included how students learn best from the perspective of both teachers and students. More specifically, the sample for individual interviews consisted of 12 students and two teachers participating in remedial courses at one urban East Coast community college.

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Truly it takes a village...

Dedication

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Virtually all community colleges offer remedial education courses in reading, writing, and mathematics to provide undergraduate students with the skills necessary to succeed in college-level work (Bailey, 2009; Soliday, 2002). The terms used to describe such courses have varied over the years with changing political and social structures, ranging from *academic preparatory programs*, *remedial education*, *compensatory education*, *learning assistance*, *developmental education*, and *access programs* (Arendale, 2005). The need for remedial classes in community colleges is apparent today based on the number of students enrolling in community colleges who are deemed academically underprepared for college-level work (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). Researchers revealed that only three to four out of 10 students referred to remediation completed the entire remediation course sequence. Most students dropped out at the beginning of their remedial sequence, and about half failed to complete even the first course in their sequence (Bailey et al., 2010). Furthermore, only about one third of students who take at least one remedial course earn a degree or a certificate within eight years of initial enrollment, and a large percentage of students who enroll in developmental courses do not persist to degree completion (Bailey et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2011).

Long and Kurlaender (2009) similarly found that only 26% of community college students completed a bachelor's degree within nine years of starting college studies, whereas more than 50% of students starting at four-year colleges achieved their degree

within that period. Long and Kurlaender (2009) also argued that the nontraditional patterns of attendance at community colleges, such as delayed enrollment after high school, part-time enrollment, and working while attending classes, may make students' progression to a four-year degree more difficult and thus make it less likely that such students complete a college degree. Furthermore, students who require substantial remediation when entering community college are far less likely to complete any 4-year course of study than those who begin college-level studies at either community colleges or four-year schools within one year of high school graduation (Jenkins & Cho, 2012). Jenkins and Cho (2012) also pointed out that much of the failure to attain four-year graduation credentials derives from the fact that students in remedial programs often fail even to enroll in any four-year program. As a whole, remedial education is extremely complex in its organizational structure, the validity of assessment used to place students, or the lack thereof, and in its pedagogical approaches.

The role of remediation in assisting students in transitioning directly from high school to a four-year college has garnered increasing attention from policy makers and scholars. Arguments have been made, suggesting that postsecondary institutions reduce educational quality by admitting students who lack college-level skills (Attewell et al., 2006). As a result, some states have begun to reduce, or even remove, remedial education programs from four-year institutions, leaving the responsibility to community colleges (Attewell et al., 2006). For example, The City University of New York phased out remedial education in all 11 of the system's four-year institutions (Ashburn, 2010). California's state-run four-year colleges and universities now require students to have college-ready skills as a condition of enrollment (Chan, 2013).

Related to diversity and remedial programs in community colleges, racial and ethnic minorities and less affluent students are overrepresented in remedial programs (Morest, 2013). In general, Black students account for about 15% of students at community colleges, and more than one third of all Black postsecondary students attend community colleges rather than four-year institutions (Morest, 2013). Similarly, Hispanic students account for about 18% of students in community colleges nationwide, and 47% of Hispanic students in postsecondary education programs are in community colleges as opposed to four-year institutions (Morest, 2013). Morest concluded that “it is likely that community colleges will continue to play a very significant role for Black and Hispanic students, especially those with parents who have not attended college” (Morest, 2013, p. 322). Kurlaender (2009) noted that for non-White students, the likelihood of attending community college rather than four-year colleges is not explained fully by their level of preparation for college-level work or low tuition costs. Instead, Kurlaender (2009) asserted that the influence of parents, high school counselors, and peers has a significant impact on the students’ choice to attend community college rather than a four-year program. Because of the demographic and other data noted above, Attewell et al. (2006) concluded that removal of remediation programs at the community college level might lead to reduced likelihood that non-White students will be able to attain a bachelor’s degree, thus cementing their economic and social disadvantage.

Evidence Supporting the Effectiveness of Remediation

Bahr (2008) investigated the effectiveness of mathematics remediation as preparation for college-level work. He tracked 85,894 students in 107 community colleges in California for six years and their academic attainment for eight years, then

compared the academic outcomes of those successfully completing remediation in mathematics with the outcomes of the students who were not required to take remedial classes. Bahr (2008) found that those students who successfully completed the remediation programs did just as well as those who did not need remediation, demonstrating the potential effectiveness of the remediation program. However, slightly over three quarters of the remediation students did not successfully complete the remediation program. Of those students who failed to complete the remedial courses, more than 81% never completed their community college credentials nor transferred to a four-year school (Bahr, 2008). In light of the effectiveness of remediation programs, an existing body of research indicates that academic outcomes for students who successfully complete remediation programs are similar to those who did not need remediation (Attewell et al., 2006; Bettinger & Long, 2007; Goldstein & Perin, 2008). Goldstein and Perin (2008) observed that students who completed remedial reading or writing coursework at a large urban community college were generally successful in their college-level courses, pointing to overall higher achievement than underprepared students who did not take remedial classes. In sum, evidence from the research suggests that although successful completion of remedial education programs at the community college level can result in positive academic outcomes, a large number of students fail to do so.

Opposition to Remediation Effectiveness

With some states moving remediation responsibilities into the realm of community colleges, placing full responsibility of remediation on two-year institutions has provoked a strong critique of community colleges (Martorell & McFarlin, 2009). The lack of student persistence, the length of time needed to complete a degree, and the

lack of organizational priorities of community colleges on remedial education are the main critiques against community colleges (Oudenhoven, 2002).

Martorell and McFarlin (2009) noted that remediation comes at a high cost—some estimates coming in at \$1 billion per year for college remediation courses even by the end of the 1990s—and that it may not be cost-effective to provide low-skilled individuals with remediation at a young adult age. In a longitudinal study of Texas students in both community and four-year colleges, students received little long-term benefit from college-entry remediation, with some indication that remediation actually worsened the long-term outcomes in some cases (Martorell & McFarlin, 2009). Furthermore, such interventions did not improve the students' overall economic earnings. Martorell and McFarlin suggested that it might be of greater economic benefit to intervene at much younger ages, suggesting programs that improve reading and math skills as early as elementary school; that is, when efforts to raise skill levels are likely to be more effective than at the young adult age.

Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez (2012) found that remediation had little overall impact on student outcomes. Specifically, Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez (2012) found that remediation courses were inadequate to improve skills; i.e., student performance in college-level classes. Students were often diverted from college-level courses to remedial courses, making the time needed to earn the degree longer. After further analysis, Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez (2012) concluded the following: (a) as many as one quarter of those diverted into remedial math and 70% of those diverted into remedial English could have succeeded in regular college classes if they had been allowed to take regular college classes without being placed into remediation courses (Ladson-Billings,

2013); (b) remediation was often ineffective, with relatively few students completing remediation programs (Bahr, 2008; Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012); and (c) a financial burden to both colleges and students existed due to the increased time to complete degree requirements (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Martorell & McFarlin, 2009; Ohio Board of Regents, 2001). As Waycaster (2001) observed, the research regarding the effectiveness of remedial education programs has been sporadic, typically underfunded, and inconclusive. The empirical evidence on remedial education to date has been unclear as to whether remedial education works and, if so, how it works in the classroom at the community college level.

Stand-alone remedial courses, as opposed to remedial material integrated into regular coursework, can negatively affect student attitudes, resulting in longer paths to attain a degree (Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd, & Wathington, 2012). Cox (2009), in particular, has noted the dichotomy between teaching styles and student perceptions of effective teaching techniques at the community college level. Although this was found to be an issue in both remedial and nonremedial classes, the impact of a less-than-optimal teaching style in a remedial program may well affect the students' likelihood of success in that program (Cox, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The basis of this study rests on a problem that is two-fold, although the second category is the primary focus of this study. First, there is a disproportionate number of underprepared students entering community colleges today (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010); and second, there is a significant lack of student persistence in remedial programs offered in community colleges to underprepared students (Jenkins, 2011). A number of students

enrolling in community college are academically underprepared for college-level work (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006), and the majority of them do not persist to degree completion (Bailey et al., 2010). More than one third of students who start their academic careers at community colleges are required to take remedial courses in reading, writing, or mathematics, compared with 25% of students at four-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Only about one third of students who take at least one remedial course earn a degree or a certificate within eight years of initial enrollment, a rate between 12% and 15% lower than those students who take no remedial courses but who have similar skills and backgrounds (Attewell et al., 2006).

The majority of students who enroll in developmental courses do not persist to degree completion (Bailey et al., 2010). Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) reported that between 25% and 40% of community college students eventually transfer to a four-year college. Approximately 25% of recent high school graduates who took at least one developmental course in community college earned a degree within eight years (Attewell et al., 2006). Furthermore, using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Studies, Cho and Karp (2013) found that over a 10-year period only 6% of students passed all of the developmental writing courses, 71% passed all reading courses, and only 30% passed math. Of those students that did pass the remedial courses, fewer than half enrolled in college-level courses. Specifically, the lack in pedagogical alignment between teacher and student weakens effective remedial education for community college students (Jenkins, 2011). When misalignment occurs, students often struggle to get their needs met and little learning may take place. However, little is known about the remedial program experience from the perspective of students and teachers through using a

qualitative framework, as so often this topic has only been examined quantitatively. Exploring community college teacher and student perspectives on remediation through a qualitative lens should bring greater insight to this subject.

Purpose of the Study

My purpose for this qualitative study was to explore why a disproportionate number of community college students do not remediate successfully, do not transfer to four-year institutions, drop out, or do not attain degrees. Certain key factors are identified as playing a significant role in student persistence in college. Grubb and Cox (2005) identified issues that have been underresearched in remedial education, noting in particular the pedagogical alignment between teacher and student as a key to effective remedial education. When a misalignment occurs, teacher and student tend to disagree about course content or teaching methods. As a result, the course might collapse and little learning occur (Grubb & Cox, 2005).

This study sought to understand the remedial program experience from the perspective of students and teachers; there is an urgent need for further research on better understanding of the true needs of the students in community college remedial classes. The study further explored a teachers' attitudes toward teaching remedial classes to evaluate the potential need of a more sophisticated and effective teaching strategy that takes into account a teacher's understanding of how students understand or misunderstand a topic.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of students and teachers toward remedial courses at one urban East Coast community

college. The research questions are as follows:

- How do students describe their experiences of participating in remedial classes?
- How do teachers describe their experiences of teaching remedial courses?
- What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes?
- What differences, if any, exist in the goals of students and teachers for remedial classes?
- What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the knowledge students are expected to acquire in order to succeed in remedial classes?

These research questions focus on understanding how students and teachers approach remedial education courses: the differences in their goals, perceptions, and desired learning methods.

Conceptual Framework

Why do students in remedial programs fail to persist in their studies at community colleges? The context of this issue is that the students and the teachers of these programs may have very different notions of how students learn best. In this study, the focus was on understanding the differences and similarities between how students in remediation programs approach and experience their learning and how the teachers approach and understand the students' learning experience. This study can offer insight into student needs in remedial programs by providing a better understanding of the dichotomy between student and teacher perspectives.

Given the large number of undergraduate students who enroll in remedial courses, researchers must examine successful components of effective instruction as well as students' perceptions of how they learn best. Grubb and Gabriner (2013) suggest that effective remedial instruction derives from a triangle of instruction that includes teacher, student, and the curriculum, placing the emphasis on the teacher's responses to the other two aspects of the triangle. Drawing upon Grubb and Gabriner's triangle of instruction and modifying it in the context of research by Cox (2009) and Jenkins (2011), the conceptual framework of this study is shown in Figure 1.

The conceptual framework places equal emphasis on responsibilities of teacher and student, positing that each of these must interact with the other two aspects of the triangle of instruction. For example, as shown in Figure 1, it is critical that teachers should have more than simple factual knowledge of the subject area. Cox (2009) noted that the disconnect between remedial students' understanding of what constitutes appropriate learning and the teachers' understanding of what learning requires, at the college level, was a critical element in transitioning from high school to college. This is illustrated in the two octagon shapes at the bottom of the triangle. Another area of potential disconnect is shown in the upper right, where the student's understanding of what knowledge is required for success in a given class or field can conflict with the teacher's understanding of what students require to become college-competent learners (Cox, 2009).

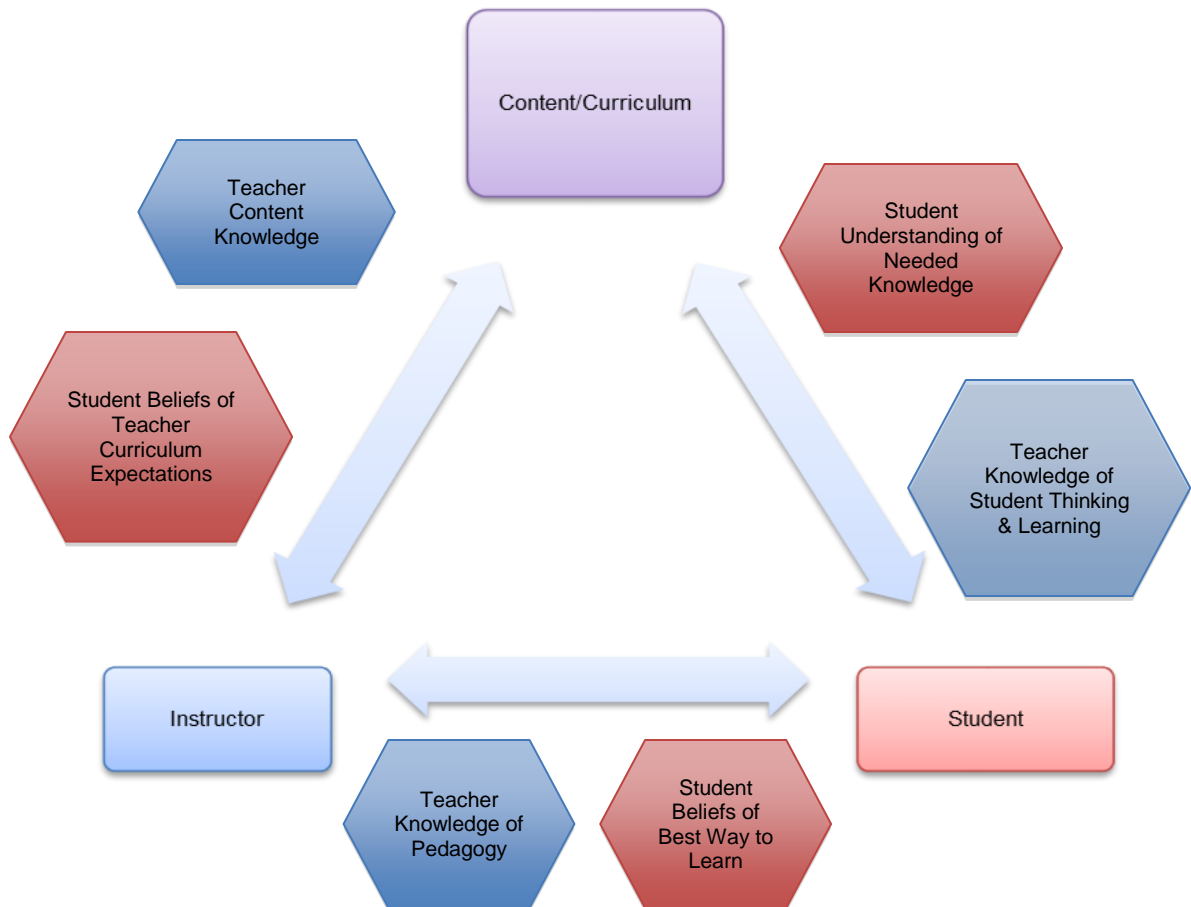


Figure 1. The triangle of instruction. Adapted from *Basic Skills Education in Community Colleges: Inside and Outside Classrooms*, by W. N. Grubb & R. Gabriner, 2013, New York, NY: Routledge. Copyright, 2013, by Routledge.

In the upper-left area, the student’s beliefs about the teacher’s expectations for acceptable performance can misalign with the teacher’s understanding of the knowledge needed in the field of study. Thus, the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 explicitly includes student conceptualizations as well as those of the teacher (Cox, 2009). This is the interplay of attitudes and responses of both students and teachers by extending

Cox's earlier study (2000) of learning attitudes of students enrolled in courses, approaches, and perspectives at a community college in northern California. In this study, I endeavored to accomplish several key goals. First, Cox's (2000) study addressed only a single remedial writing class with a handful of students. Her 2002 follow-up study, also reported in her book titled *The College Fear Factor*, was broader, covering six community college campuses in the Southwest but included only nonremedial students, who could move directly into college-level work upon enrollment. Thus, it is unclear whether the results from that larger study are generalizable to remedial students. Partially replicating the initial 2000 study in an urban East Coast community college, one heavily attended by racial and ethnic minority students, will be an important contribution to, and validation of, Cox's work. Finally, the 14 years between Cox's study and the current study may also reveal changes in student and/or teacher perspectives. During those 14 years, most students entering colleges have experienced standards that predate Common Core, No Child Left Behind, and other elementary and secondary educational efforts implemented throughout the country. Furthermore, the average age of students enrolling in community college is over 22, and many are considerably older and have not attended school for many years, putting them at an educational disadvantage, especially in relationship to inappropriate placement testing (Belfield & Crosta, 2012).

Study and Design

A case-study research design was appropriate for use within this study. According to Yin (2014), a case study involves research questions that ask how and why, which are consistent with the research questions in this study. Whereas much of the research has used quantitative approaches to determine the impact of taking remedial

classes on academic outcomes, qualitative research has been less extensively used to offer a better understanding of why students do not remediate successfully. Of particular interest is the fact that remedial programs work well when students successfully complete remedial courses, but students often fail to complete them. Therefore, it is important for researchers to understand why remedial programs so often fail and what are the perspectives of students and teachers in relationship to this lack of academic success.

Only a limited number of qualitative studies have addressed the influence of teaching methods and student learning approaches on the effectiveness of remedial programs as a whole. To explore this topic more fully, the design of this study featured in-class observations of student interactions with both teachers and other students and interviews of students and teachers. The primary method of data collection for this study was interviews. In-depth interviews allowed student participants to reflect on their experiences of being in a remedial program and allowed teachers to reflect on their experiences of teaching remedial classes at a community college. Along with the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, I conducted classroom observations. The observational notes gathered offered evidence of actual practices, discussions, and other interactions among students and teachers. Additionally, the notes documented the nature of each individual's roles and degree of participation. The review of the literature provided further insight into the failure or success of the remediation process; I triangulated data derived from interviews, from the literature, and from observations to answer the research questions and to deepen my understanding of remediation for community college students.

Significance of the Study

For developmental education programs to remain viable, an understanding of both students' and teachers' perspectives is critical. Although quantitative studies are useful in identifying statistical assessments of such factors as student persistence and likelihood of degree attainment, such an approach is limited in providing an in-depth understanding of the student experience and insight to improve the success of students in remedial courses.

In this qualitative case study, I sought to understand remedial students' and teachers' perspectives on learning by taking a multipronged data collection effort. The data collection effort included (a) classroom-based observations of teaching methods and student attitudes and approaches and (b) interviews of both students and teachers. The interviews included questions about how students believe they learn best in order to help researchers understand the problem from the perspective of both teachers and students. While previous studies (Cox, 2004, Jenkins, 2011; Perun, 2014) have revealed associations between teaching pedagogy and student perceptions of teaching in limited samples, the ultimate goal of this project was to determine how faculty and students describe the teaching methods conducive to successful student learning by exploring the perspectives of students and teachers toward remedial education in community colleges.

Limitations

There are a number of potential limitations to the design of this study and the methodology employed. The first is that a single researcher conducted the observational research. In some sense, this means that there was only one perspective from which the data were interpreted. Second and related, the same researcher who collected the data,

including conducting the interviews and gathering observational data, also analyzed the collected data. Thus, there was another point of entry for researcher bias. Ideally, researcher tasks are separate, which makes the introduction of bias more difficult. Even so, I went to great lengths to ensure that the results of the study were analyzed objectively. In addition, a design limitation was that the observational data might act only to support the data obtained from the interviews, rather than being stand-alone data that can produce independent results. However, such a design would likely need to be experimental. Details regarding case, population, participants, and other defining factors are explained and expanded upon in Chapter III.

Definition of Terms

This study uses the following definitions:

Community College. A nonresidential junior college established to serve a specific community and typically supported in part by local government funds (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

Common Core State Standards. A set of academic standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts/Literacy (ELA) in state-mandated public education that outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade (Barnett & Fay, 2013).

Constructivism. A descriptive theory of learning that promotes interaction between prior knowledge and new knowledge to be learned through more involved participation between educators and students (Fosnot, 2013).

Developmental Education. A field of research, policy, and practice focused on student success at the postsecondary level. Attuned especially to those students who

struggle, due to a variety of factors, in their first year (and beyond) of a two- or four-year college, the field seeks to understand the reasons for those struggles, support those students who struggle, and define the role of higher education as a place where all learners can succeed (Bailey et al., 2010).

Remedial Education. Classes taken on a college campus that are below college-level. Students pay tuition and can use financial aid for remedial courses, but they do not receive college credit. Within and among states, “remedial” often is used interchangeably with the terms “developmental” and “basic skills” (Bettinger & Long, 2005).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in the following manner. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II contains an in-depth review of the literature regarding the research topic. Chapter III includes a discussion of the research design and methods used in this investigation, including a discussion of the data collection process and the strategies used in the analysis process. Chapter IV presents the general findings of the study and a discussion of the meaning of those results in the context of the research questions posed. Chapter V presents a summary that outlines the key findings of the study, how those findings relate to the literature, implications of the findings for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an in-depth perspective on the issues associated with remedial education at the community college level. The focus of this review is on pedagogical issues identified in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter I. Specifically, the key issues identified in this study include the role of community colleges as transitional institutions from K-12 education, both teachers' and students' expectations for remedial programs, and the problem of students lacking persistence.

Role of Community Colleges as Transitional Institutions from K-12

The purpose of remedial education is in question today (Long, 2005; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Researchers, including Bettinger and Long (2005) and Melguizo, Bos, and Prather (2011), have argued that the public should not have to pay for the same instruction a second time; i.e., K-12 instruction and community college instruction of the same material. They point out the limited evidence of overall effectiveness in remedial education at community colleges, whereas others defend the benefits of remedial courses as a means of preparing tomorrow's workforce. This current policy debate about the purpose of remediation is consistent with debates that have occurred in the past, "revealing the paradox of needing remedial education to serve academically underprepared students while simultaneously arguing over its appropriateness in education" (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010, p. 3). A survey of legislatures in the states of Texas, New Jersey, Montana, Florida, and Oregon revealed that despite concern and divisiveness about the allocation of tax dollars for remedial education in college, they are in agreement that the root of the problem stems from the K-12 sector. However, they

are unclear as to who is responsible and thus who should pay for remedial education once students enroll in postsecondary education (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

The question of who should be responsible for educating underprepared students has been the center of ongoing debates between policy makers and higher education leaders. To validate this idea, Oudenhoven (2002, p. 37) asserted, “How or even whether higher education should address the needs of students who are not prepared for college-level work is a divisive issue.” Although it may be helpful to have a policy in place that will ensure that all students in need of remediation enroll in the courses, the problem goes beyond simply enrolling students in remedial courses. Even when students do take remedial classes, the standards for demonstrating whether students are college-ready are unclear. As noted earlier, although standards do exist for defining the requirements to be admitted to remedial programs, no national standards exist for determining when students are ready for college-level coursework. Such a lack of consensus often results in poorly informed public policy decisions and greater costs to taxpayers (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Phipps, 1998).

Remedial class sizes are often larger and taught by low-paid adjuncts in community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Bettinger & Long, 2007). Community colleges heavily rely on the use of adjunct (part-time or contingent) faculty as a cost-saving measure. Although data on the use of such faculty in remedial programs at community colleges are scarce, one study of three Florida community colleges conducted by Bogert (2004) noted that the increasing use of inexperienced teachers results in lowered teaching quality. In addition, of the 22,000 teachers in Bogert’s study, fewer than 5,000 were regular, full-time faculty members,

indicating that 78% of the teachers were part-time, inexperienced faculty. Bogert (2004, p. 29) concluded that “excessive use of and reliance on part-time faculty in lower-level courses may lead to a greater number of underprepared students, causing a disadvantage for students.”

Community colleges also exhibit organizational shortcomings that affect their ability to provide effective remediation. Several issues plague two-year colleges, including ineffective placement testing between community colleges and four-year schools; ineffective teachers and teaching methods in remedial programs; and negative student attitudes and lack of determination to succeed (Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Oudenhoven, 2002). Oudenhoven (2002) added other concerns with community college remediation efforts: having such programs available at the community college level acts as a disincentive for students to do well in high school, the reduced academic quality of courses offered, and low graduation rates. Oudenhoven also noted that the decision on who is required for remedial education is not systematically made; rather, the decision is made using an arbitrary test score or grade-level cutoff. No consensus has been reached as to how low or high scores or grades need to be for success in college-level courses (Oudenhoven, 2002).

Levels of effectiveness of remedial education vary depending on the academic achievement levels of the students prior to enrolling in the courses (Boatman & Long, 2010). For example, in a study of Tennessee students, Boatman and Long (2010) found that those with the lowest prior academic achievement received greater success in writing courses after enrolling in the remedial writing program than did those with somewhat better academic achievement who also took the remedial classes. It is interesting to note

that those students on the borderline of needing remedial training did not benefit from taking such courses, whereas those who definitely needed it often had positive results (Boatman & Long, 2010). Furthermore, by the end of the third year, students in remedial programs earned six fewer college credits than those who never took remedial training (Boatman & Long, 2010). The findings of their research suggest that students should not be arbitrarily assigned to remedial courses unless they truly need the additional training, providing a much more nuanced consideration of the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of remedial programs.

Remedial Education and High School Standards

The question of remedial education aligning with high school standards has been under discussion for some time (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013). Several researchers consider high school preparation a predictor of degree attainment and indicative of the need for community college remediation (Adelman, 1999; Wang, 2009). Attewell, Lavin, and Thurston (2006) suggested that poor high school preparation is attributable to remediation—a misalignment between high schools and colleges. Although poor high school preparation may certainly be a contributing factor in producing students in need of remediation, it should not be considered a reason why remediation may be necessary.

Raising a concern for the rigor of high school programs, Hoyt and Sorensen (2001) examined Utah Valley State College to determine how high school preparation affects remedial placement rates. They argued that although high school preparation is related to remediation, it is not a predictor of student success in college. They found that students entering an urban state college had high remedial placement rates even though they successfully completed college prep math courses in high school. More than one

third of students who successfully completed 12th grade English had test scores that placed them into remedial English. Their study revealed that successful high school achievement did not imply college readiness (Hoyt & Sorensen, 2001).

Other researchers, such as Howell (2011), have asserted that high school graduation standards do not coincide with the competencies necessary for college-level work, suggesting the need for curricular alignment between high school and college (Howell, 2011). For instance, Oregon has made a statewide attempt to address this misalignment, beginning in 1995. The state made progress at elementary, secondary, and college entry checkpoints by first implementing K–16 standards (Chamberlin & Plucker, 2008). Other states, including California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Indiana have made similar efforts to align curricula across levels from primary school through college and, in some cases, through doctoral levels (Chamberlin & Plucker, 2008). Although these programs offer promise as a first step toward eliminating the need for remediation, empirical evidence is sparse that they actually work (Chamberlin & Plucker, 2008).

Furthermore, it has been noted in a study by Michael Marder (2016), a physics professor at the University of Texas at Austin, that certain indicators of the need for remediation, such as algebra II, are frequently used in placing students into remedial programs (Marder, 2016). However, Algebra II and similar classes are frequently teaching students unneeded skills for entering into the workforce. Therefore, using this class, or any others with similar properties and used for assessing college readiness, is ineffective. Often, these standards serve to place individuals at lower socioeconomic levels at a disadvantage because they have not had the same access to education that those with greater access to financial resources may have had (Marder, 2016). These

findings were reinforced by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) (2013) who examined the assumption that having full knowledge of Algebra I and II and geometry as a means to work toward calculus, was an appropriate measure of college readiness. The study cited that these classes are not necessary in practice and are therefore an inefficient way in which to assess students for college preparedness (NCEE, 2013).

Along these lines, placement tests such as Accuplacer and Compass are typically used to place students into college classes. However, the use of these tests, often coming out of the Common Core State Standards mandated in much of K-12 education today, are inaccurate (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). Consistent with the findings from the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia, Belfield and Crosta (2012) report that the Accuplacer assessment misplaces 33% of all students, and the Compass test misplaces 27% of students. Of particular note, it has been found that the College Board and ACT (creator of the placement exams) stand to benefit financially from the use of these tests, as do community colleges for their remedial programs (Belfield & Crosta, 2012).

Another source of misalignment lies within the remediation programs themselves. Once students have been identified, although often incorrectly as noted, and placed into remedial programs, do those programs teach the students the skills necessary to succeed in regular college courses? As of 2012, 45 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English and math as their framework for secondary education. The goal of such adoption is to ensure that high school and entry-level college curricula are better aligned; students can be expected to have a minimum set of skills if they graduate

from schools adhering to the CCSS (Barnett & Fay, 2013). However, this initiative has been fraught with problems in reducing or eliminating any seeming misalignment between community colleges and high schools in terms of expected achievement levels. Although Farnett and Fay (2013) suggested that community colleges adopt an assessment standard based on 11th grade achievement, as defined by the CCSS program in both math and English, clearly this will not serve the majority of community college students. Instead, other measures such as using GPA for placement in college may be more effective (Belfield & Crosta, 2012).

Remedial Education Issues

Several important remedial education issues include ethnic and minority issues and teacher expectations being misaligned with student expectations.

Ethnic Issues

Bettinger and Long (2005) examined the effects of remedial education on minority students within the Ohio Community College system. They found that over three quarters of Black and Hispanic students are placed into math remediation courses compared with 55% of White students. In English remediation, Black and Hispanic students accounted for 68% enrollment compared with 39% of White students. Although two thirds of all Ohio Community College students completed their first semester of remedial courses, Black and Hispanic students were less likely than White and Asian students to complete their remediation courses (Ohio Board of Regents, 1998–2003). In their study, Bettinger and Long (2005) concluded that minorities are more likely than their White counterparts to take remedial courses. Other researchers (Castator & Tollefson, 1996; Crane, McKay, & Poziemski, 2002; Crews & Aragon, 2007; Howell,

2001) have revealed that race and poverty play a significant role in students' need for remediation.

Teacher Expectations of College and Remedial Programs

Callahan and Chumney (2009) interviewed teachers of remedial writing programs on what their expectations were for the necessary skills for students to acquire. The teachers were clear that students simply producing grammatically correct sentences was not the solution, but rather that students needed the ability to reshape and reformulate arguments into a cohesive and thoughtful presentation. Yet, that was not a universal approach, with some teachers spending at least half of the semester focusing solely on grammar and punctuation (Callahan & Chumney, 2009). Cox (2009) also found that the expectations of teachers varied widely, defining two almost polar approaches, one in which the teachers assumed that college-level work was the goal of the program and the other in which the focus on grammar, paragraph structure, and other fundamentals was most important.

With such a lack of cohesion among the teachers in terms of what is important for students to learn in remedial courses, one can understand how remedial programs have varying levels of effectiveness. Even the definition of what *college level* means has no universal standard. Callahan and Chumney (2009) found that one standard was the use of written resources to support cohesive arguments and another was to identify and correct grammatical problems. Callahan and Chumney (2009) found that students in one class were expected to construct cohesive and coherent arguments in support of their positions in their class essays and discussions, whereas students in a second class that nominally followed the same course curricula and assessments spent most of their coursework on

grammar and vocabulary exercises.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) defined seven key principles of quality college-level education: connecting students and faculty members, developing a cooperative learning community among the students, using active learning techniques, giving prompt feedback, putting an emphasis on spending time on tasks, establishing and communicating high expectations, and demonstrating respect for diverse talents and abilities. These principles represent the traditional approach to college-level work. When applied to remedial programs, however, the insistence on students' active participation in the learning process may be an obstacle. Cox (2004) noted that students in remedial programs often expect the teacher to "feed" the knowledge to them rather than taking on the role of active learners. The concept that Chickering and Gamson (1987) noted, of teachers having high expectations, is also potentially in conflict with students' desires to know just enough to get by; that is, to get the grade, to progress to the next course, to get the certificate, degree, or reach their next immediate goal (Cox, 2004).

Student Expectations of College and Remedial Programs

Many remedial program teachers base their curricula on teaching student skills such as analysis, assessment, and thinking (Callahan & Chumney, 2009; Cox, 2009). Callahan and Chumney (2009) noted that a change in approach is needed to prepare students for college-level work. They indicated that the change should be from teaching a simple concept (e.g., the ability to write a composition with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion) to teaching a complete skill set of reading critically, analyzing, and evaluating issues and arguments. This does not necessarily align with student beliefs of what constitutes teaching and learning in remedial education. For example, Callahan and

Chumney (2009) interviewed students in a remedial writing class about their experiences in the program. Many expressed greater confidence in their ability to succeed at college-level work after completing a remedial program that focused on such skills (Callahan & Chumney, 2009).

Perhaps the key to the conflict between student and teacher expectations of remedial programs is that teachers expect students to take responsibility for their learning process as a way of fostering higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Levesque-Briston, n.d.). In contrast, students often expect teachers to teach them what they need to learn—and nothing except those essentials, if that, in order to just “get to the next class” and out of college (Cox, 2004, 2009). This dichotomy of perspective exemplifies an overall example of misaligned expectations, and addressing why some students feel this way is important to assess, given the reason or reasons for being in remedial classes in the first place.

Student Persistence Issues

The majority of students who enroll in developmental courses do not persist to degree completion (Bailey et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2011). Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) reported that between 25% and 40% of community college students eventually transfer to a four-year college. Approximately 25% of recent high school graduates who took at least one developmental course in community college earned a degree within eight years (Attewell et al., 2006).

Key factors have been identified as playing a significant role in student persistence in college. A study of Hispanic students in community college found that factors such as taking more math courses in high school, having parents with more

education, and attending school full time all tended to improve the likelihood that the students would continue in college after their freshman year (Crisp & Nora, 2010). On the other hand, delaying enrollment in college for more than one year after high school graduation and working more hours per week while attending school were associated with reduced likelihood of persisting in college after the freshman year (Crisp & Nora, 2009). Issues such as enrolling in developmental courses, receiving financial aid, and attending a Hispanic-serving institution affected the likelihood that they would persist after their second or third year of college only; those factors did not have an effect on the students staying in college after their first year (Crisp & Nora, 2009).

Comparing nonremedial students with remedial program enrollees, Crisp and Nora (2009) also found that taking more math courses was important for nonremedial students only and that education levels, in respect to parental roles, was important for remedial students only. In other words, remedial students who presumably attended remedial math courses to make up for lack of math in high school were not affected in terms of their persistence to complete their community college experience (Crisp & Nora, 2009). Crisp and Nora (2009) concluded that environmental and demographic factors were key to keeping students in school; these factors included having parents with more education, providing strong financial support that negates the need for the student to work while attending school, and having a strong high school background (Crisp & Nora, 2009).

Other research by Wang (2009) adds yet another factor: student gender. Wang (2009) found that one of the most important factors predicting attainment of a four-year degree for community college students who went through remediation programs was

being female, with women being nearly 2.5 times more likely to get a degree than men are. Wang's research confirms Crisp and Nora's (2009) findings that working has a negative impact on the likelihood of attaining a four-year degree after community college while attending school. Wang also confirmed Crisp and Nora's (2009) findings that being underprepared for college work and having to take remediation courses in reading or math also negatively affected the likelihood of a community college student attaining a four-year degree, with math remediation being a far stronger negative predictor of college success. This is consistent with the work of Bahr (2008), finding that few students—only about one in eight—entering math remediation programs completed the programs successfully. On the other hand, Bahr's study (2008) concluded that taking math remediation had no negative impact on the college success rate for those who successfully passed remedial math courses.

Bailey et al. (2010) examined student progression through multiple levels of remedial education in college courses, questioning the purpose and effect of remediation at community colleges. They found that only three to four out of 10 students referred to remediation completed the entire remediation course sequence. Most students dropped out in the beginning of their remedial sequence, and about half failed to complete even the first course in their sequence (Bailey et al., 2010).

Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Studies, Cho and Karp (2013) found that over a 10-year period only 6% of students passed all of the developmental writing courses, 71% passed all reading courses, and only 30% passed math. Of those students that did pass the remedial courses, fewer than half enrolled in college-level courses.

Bailey (2009) asserted that research appears to offer some general guidance but conclusive evidence on the effectiveness of particular teaching and remedial strategies is minimal. He suggested making a broad change to the remedial education programs, including a comprehensive assessment of student skills. Bailey (2009) also suggested the need for targeted longitudinal research that tracks students from “underprepared upon entry” through their entire community college experience. Other Bailey (2009) suggestions included strong attempts to improve the pedagogy in ways that blur the line between remedial and college-level coursework and the development of strategies to streamline the remedial programs to accelerate students into regular college-level work.

Constructivism Applied to Remedial Education

Constructivism is a descriptive theory of learning that promotes interaction between prior knowledge and new knowledge to be learned through more involved participation, especially between students, but also between educators and students (Fosnot, 2013). Textbook progression and standardized test scores have long been used as measures of how effective educators are at achieving desired learning outcomes. However, constructivism stresses and focuses on the interactions that occur in the classroom, both as an internal measure of progress that the teacher can use to gauge what to teach next and as an external measure of progress, such as grades (Fosnot, 2013). Although constructivism is only descriptive and does not, in itself, grant specific methodologies for teachers to use, this may be viewed as an advantage of constructivism because it enables the comparison of two or more methodologies through constructivist ideas. Twomey (2006) discussed the ways in which constructivism is applicable to special-needs and remedial educations. For remedial education, constructivism

encourages meaningful and active interactions between teachers and students to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the students in particular areas of study (Twomey, 2006). This enables remedial education teachers to better guide future lesson plans and target the weakest areas of individual students. Additionally, constructivism, as applied to remedial education, emphasizes the importance of individual attention to each student (Twomey, 2006). The individual attention paid to each student is, thus, a measure of quality instruction methodology under constructivism.

Although constructivism is the overarching theoretical framework for this study, the specific theoretical framework relied upon is the triangle of instruction, as shown below in Figure 2. This model, which places equal emphasis on responsibilities of the teacher and the student, posits that each of these must interact with the other two aspects of the triangle of instruction. It also demonstrates how critical it is that the teachers should have more than simple factual knowledge of the subject area. Cox (2009) noted that the disconnect between remedial students' understanding of what constitutes appropriate learning and the teachers' understanding of what learning requires at the college level was a critical element in transitioning from high school to college for students attending college immediately after high school. This is illustrated in the two octagon shapes at the bottom of the triangle.

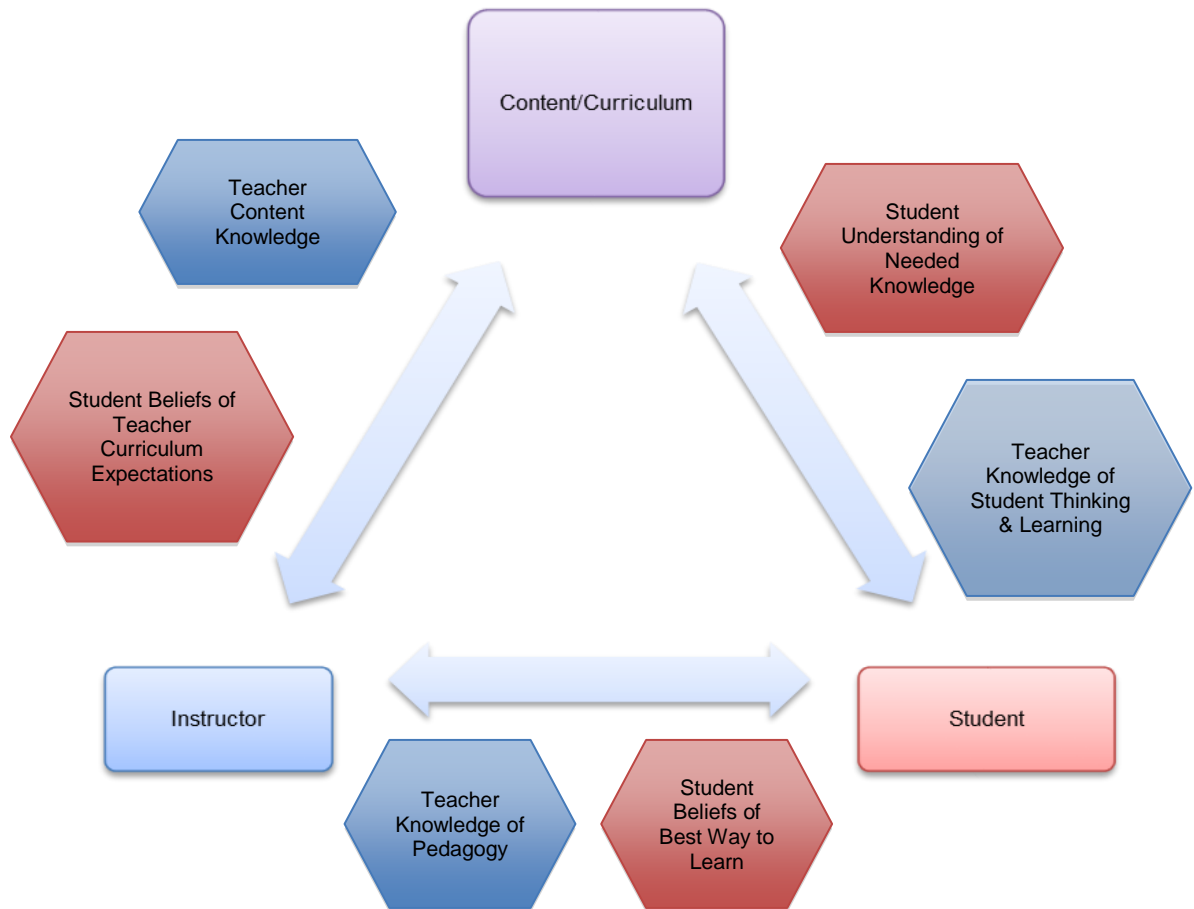


Figure 2. The triangle of instruction. Adapted from Basic Skills Education in Community Colleges: Inside and Outside Classrooms, by W. N. Grubb & R. Gabriner, 2013, New York, NY: Routledge. Copyright, 2013, by Routledge.

One of my primary goals in the study was thus to replicate and extend Cox's earlier study (2000) of remedial student learning attitudes, approaches, and perspectives at a community college in northern California. My study sought to accomplish several key goals. First, Cox's original study, conducted in 2000, addressed only a single

remedial writing class with a handful of students. Her 2002 follow-up study, also reported in her book *The College Fear Factor*, was broader, covering six community college campuses in the Southwest. However, that study included only nonremedial students, who could move directly into college-level work upon enrollment. Thus, it is unclear whether the results from that larger study are generalizable to remedial students. Replicating the initial 2000 study in an urban East Coast community college, one heavily attended by racial and ethnic minority students, was an important extension and validation of Cox's work. Finally, the 14 years between Cox's study and the current study also revealed changes in student and/or teacher perspectives, influenced by standards such as Common Core, No Child Left Behind, and other elementary and secondary educational efforts that have resulted in inaccurate testing measures for placing students into college classes (Belfield & Crosta, 2012).

Summary

This literature review highlighted key issues in remedial education programs at the community college level. The first issue investigated was the problem of the role of community colleges as a stepping-stone between secondary and college-level education. Issues of the cost of remedial education at the community college level are countered by the need to provide more highly trained workers and the issue of open access to higher education. Of importance in this is the issue of alignment of placement and curricula. In this regard, the lack of alignment between college placement tests and course placement and curricula being taught is highlighted.

A second key issue is the misaligned expectations of remedial courses between teachers and students. Teachers of remedial programs operate on a spectrum ranging

from strict adherence to four-year college standards to loosening those standards to provide basic background information. Misalignment is evident in Callahan and Chumney's (2009) investigation of remedial writing programs, in which one teacher focused on teaching analytical reading and synthesis and evaluation techniques, whereas another focused primarily on grammar and punctuation. When teachers have such varying expectations of the students and the program, it is not surprising to find that teachers and students are similarly misaligned in their expectations. Cox (2004, 2009) found that although teachers of remedial programs often expected the students to take responsibility for the learning process, students wanted the teachers simply to tell them what they needed to know and they were not always willing or able to do the work.

A third key issue that entangles all of these is the issue of students' lack of persistence. Why do so few community college students transition to a four-year program? Although studies vary in their focus, the data indicate that less than half of all community college students ever make it to a four-year college and that many do not even persist through their first year in community college. Studies have identified several factors, such as lack of financial support (forcing students to work while attending school), lack of parental education, and lack of appropriate coursework in high school. Worse yet, students in remedial programs—particularly those taking remedial math programs—are very likely to drop out of school before even achieving a two-year college degree.

We have limited understanding about why many students in remedial programs fail to thrive in community college, but without question, it is a significant problem that is most likely tied into multiple layers of systems that need restructuring (Attewell et al.,

2006; Bailey et al., 2010). While studies have pointed out that remedial education should not be the responsibility of community colleges and ends up being costly to taxpayers (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Phipps, 1998), others say it is essential to provide this service to those who frequently lack access to resources, such as minority students and those struggling economically (Kurlaender, 2009; Morest, 2013; Perun, 2014). It has been implied that the real issue lies with the failure in the K-12 system of education more than anything else (Bailey et al., 2010). Despite the importance the role K-12 education plays in this issue, this study focuses on how an understanding of the perceptions of students and teachers toward remedial classes at community colleges can illuminate why students so often fail to remediate (Jenkins, 2011).

Many researchers have asserted that the primary problem is the lack of alignment between college programs and placement testing that inaccurately places students in remedial classes (Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Cho & Karp, 2013). Other research has pointed to a failure in the actual structure and use of remedial programs in community colleges as the main problem in the lack of student remediation in this area (Chamberlin & Plucker, 2008). For example, one study stresses that students are not being tested appropriately when entering into remedial programs and are placed incorrectly (Attewell et al., 2006). Yet, another study has examined the problem from the reference point of funding, asserting that community colleges lack the funds to hire full-time fully accredited and subject-savvy teachers (Bogert, 2004).

All of these factors may play a role in the problem of community college students remediating; nevertheless, the aim of this study was how to address the issue directly. Change on a large scale typically takes place at a slower pace; therefore, this study may

be able to promote present-day solutions by exploring students' and teachers' perceptions for improvement to occur at the classroom level. This study, although supported by the work of Cox (2004, 2009) and Schnee (2014), provides additional valuable insight into the problem taking place at the classroom level. The relevant Cox study (2004) collected data from 15 years ago and was only a small study. Schnee's (2014) study of 15 remedial students in a Northeastern community college was able to follow up with only nine students who succeeded in community college and focused more on their changing perceptions of the usefulness of the remedial program for their later college success. Perun's (2014) more recent study has illuminated that students failed to pass classes due to a misalignment between student and teacher college-level writing expectations as well as certain student's disinclination to do the work.

Another study by Jenkins (2011) has also contributed to this study by offering that the problem in remedial community college education is related to student and teacher pedagogical misalignment of teaching and learning styles. Jenkins' (2011) study is more recent and applicable to the issues directly explored in this study. Nevertheless, and while most of the other studies mentioned have provided valuable insight into the problem of remedial student success in community colleges, the study undertaken here serves to address a significant gap in the literature in a tangible manner. As a continuation of the work of Cox (2000, 2002) and Jenkins (2011), this study provides an even deeper understanding of how students and teachers perceive their remedial program experiences in the classroom, to potentially effect change. This study is crucial to unearthing more about the actual interaction between students and teachers in the classroom because change can often be instigated at the site of the problem and in a more

direct way. Chapter III presents the research design and methods that were used to investigate this issue.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of both students and teachers of remedial community college classes. This chapter discusses research design and method, including site selection, data collection, and data analysis. For this study, a qualitative approach was best suited to develop an understanding of how students in classrooms are effectively motivated by individual ideologies, how student behaviors are influenced by the ideologies of others, and how the common experiences of students may create different and unique interpretations based on differing perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The epistemological approach to this study was to understand the beliefs of the participants from a social constructivist perspective (Creswell, 2014). Both the teachers and students develop particular “subjective meanings” that are “negotiated socially” through specific “historical and cultural norms” (Creswell, 2014, p. 9). The data collection and analysis were therefore focused on the development of an understanding of the specific perspectives of the teachers concerning their teaching experiences and the students concerning their learning experiences.

It was also important to determine how these perspectives influence the actions taken by both teachers and students concerning student learning outcomes. For teachers, the most important aspect under investigation in this study were the pedagogical perspectives, whereas for the students, the learning behaviors are thought to be influenced by the perspectives of the teachers. The intent of this study was to develop a better understanding of each “actor’s perspective through detailed interviews and observations,” in an effort to better interpret the behavior of both teachers and students (Denzin &

Lincoln, 1998, p. 11). Through both in-class observations and interviews, this study sought to explore how the perspectives and experiences of students and teachers in remedial courses shape the learning outcomes of students. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following:

- How do students describe their experiences of participating in remedial classes?
- How do teachers describe their experiences of teaching remedial courses?
- What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes?
- What differences, if any, exist in the goals of students and teachers for remedial classes?
- What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the knowledge students are expected to acquire in order to succeed in remedial classes?

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach. According to Yin (2014), a case study involves research questions that ask why and how questions, which is consistent with the research questions formulated for this study. A case study research design is also appropriate when multiples perspectives and methods are used (Stake, 2013). Furthermore, a case study approach is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real world context” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Analyzing multiple questions and collecting perceptual data, in addition to an analysis of the literature, are also consistent with using teachers and students as participants.

Design

The design of this study featured in-class observations of student interactions with both teachers and other students and interviews of students and teachers. The primary method of data collection for this study was interviews. Both students and teachers participated in semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Each participating student and teacher was interviewed twice for this study, once in the middle of the semester and once near the end of the semester. In addition to data collected from interviews, additional data were collected through classroom observations in remedial English classes at an urban, community college in the Northeastern United States. In all, two sections each of two classes were observed. Two of the classes were remedial English and two were remedial writing. The teachers interviewed were each teachers of remedial education in the English Department. The department was informed of the interviews and observations prior to the interviews and observations.

The data collection began in early February 2015 after receiving Seton Hall Institutional Review Board approval. In an effort to better understand the learning experiences of students in developmental English, and how such experiences may contribute to student success or failure, this study focused on student learning experiences, in particular the content of the class and the pedagogical aspects of learning, as well as how students responded to different learning approaches.

This study was conducted during the course of a single semester (spring 2015). In this study, every class session of each section was observed during a span of six weeks of the semester, starting in the middle of the semester. One class per section each week for the remainder of the semester was observed, and detailed notes were taken on the class

per section chosen for the observation. In addition to the classroom observations, the study included semi-structured interviews with the participating teachers and students. It should be noted that one major weakness of the design of the study was that it might not have yielded representative data, due to the observations being drawn from in-class experiences, rather than from controlled experiments. In other words, the proposed study may have led to overrepresentation of students who interacted more with other students and with the teacher. A strength of this design is that it draws on three unique, but related, sources of data (Cox, 2000, 2002; Jenkins, 2011; Perun, 2014), as well as the rich literature associated with this topic.

College Setting

The setting of this college is in a major urban area. It is a small college and covers three city blocks. The mission of the college is to provide an avenue of education for those who may not otherwise have access to higher education. The college enrolls 13,424 students (Collegeview, 2015). The college has 925 faculty members on staff, 145 full-time and 780 part-time. The college offers a number of distance learning and weekend courses such as accounting, business administration, and information technology courses. At the time of the study, the college offering of remedial courses included seven classes: three math, two reading, one writing, and one reading and writing. The previous enrollment was relatively high for remedial courses. In the previous two summer sessions in 2014, enrollment for remedial classes was more than 650 in the first semester and 250 in the second. In the spring of 2014, the enrollment for remedial courses at this college was 6,400 students (Collegeview, 2015).

Table 1

Undergraduate Students Enrolled in Fall 2013

Undergraduate enrollment	12,175
Students enrolled in one or more remedial courses	4,598
Percentage of total enrolled in one or more remedial courses	37.8%

Table 2

*First-Time and Full-Time (FTFT) Students Enrolled in Remediation in Fall 2013
(Urban Community College, 2014)*

FTFT students	2,109
FTFT students enrolled in one or more remedial courses	1,773
Percentage of FTFT students enrolled in one or more remedial courses	84.1%

Table 3

FTFT Students Enrolled in Remediation in Fall 2013 by Subject Area (Urban Community College, 2014)

Subject Area	No. of FTFT Enrolled	% of FTFT
Computation	1,401	66.4
Algebra	166	7.9
Reading	253	12.0
Writing	0	0.0
English	1,561	74.0

There is considerable racial and ethnic diversity at the college as well. As noted in Table 4 below, African Americans and Hispanics account for the majority of the student population.

Table 4

Student Body Diversity

Race	Percent
White	9%
African American	48%
Asian	3%
Hispanic	25%
Native American	0%
Native/Pacific Islander	0%
Mixed Race	1%
International Student	8%
Unknown Race	6%

(Collegeview, 2015)

Approximately 58% of students are full-time, and 37% are part-time. The highest graduation rate for 2014 was 25% for international students, with all other students graduating at much lower rates, as noted in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Student Body Graduation Rate

Men	7%
Women	8%
White	12% (25/202)
African American	5% (68/1461)
Hispanic	9% (54/597)
Asian/Pacific Islander	8% (5/64)
Native American	0% (0/7)
Race Unknown	9% (13/148)
International Student	25% (42/167)

(Collegeview, 2015)

Participants

Two teachers and 12 students participated in face-to-face interviews, while the other students in the classroom were observed for further interpretation of the classroom participation portion of the study. The selection criteria for the teachers were as follows: (a) that they are teachers of either remedial English reading or writing, and (b) that they do not have overly high failure rates for students (e.g., at least average passing rates for students). The criteria for students were that they attend either remedial reading or remedial writing classes at the college, that they generally ranged in age from 18-40, and that they were in one of the two sections available for each class.

In an effort to conduct specific analyses that aimed at developing a useful understanding of the experiences and learning perspectives of students and the experiences and pedagogical perspectives of teachers, I included observations of two sections (of each class) of developmental English at the urban community college. The

decision of which teachers to include for participation in this study was based upon evidence in the research that showed that certain teaching methods employed by teachers tend to produce student disengagement while providing classroom environments void of meaningful learning (Grubb & Gabriner, 2013). Given that the goal of this study was to develop an understanding of how students perceive success and learn in remedial English class, I adopted Perun's (2014) approach and selected teachers who did not use remedial pedagogy in their course. Thus, developmental English teachers who use a range of pedagogies to engage students in learning were chosen, which allowed me to observe how students understood, and responded, to the varying teaching styles that were being employed in the classroom.

Teachers who assert that they approach their teaching in ways that view student learning as a process that builds on prior knowledge were sought out (Brophy, 2013). Important to the research design was having meaningful teachers who voiced a verbal commitment to teaching approaches in which student success would be likely to be fostered. For this study, teachers were contacted only after I had met with the lead advisor of the Developmental Educational Department.

Upon introduction to potential teacher participants, I explained the project and asked whether they were willing to participate in the study. As part of the informal interview process, I asked that the teachers describe their approaches to teaching developmental English as well as their views on remedial students. During the classroom observations, I sought out demonstrations of engaging teaching methods that were developed through the relationship between teachers and students.

Data Collection

The data collection process included both interviews and observations. The focus of the classroom observations was on how students learn and interact with the teacher and the teacher's approach to teaching. By focusing on these aspects, I attempted to determine the pedagogical approaches taken and discover any emerging themes for how students perceive specific instructional practices from the teacher. During the classroom observations, I looked for demonstrations of engaging teaching methods that were developed in the relationships between the teachers and the students. I arrived early to each class in order to best observe students without interrupting them or negatively affecting the results of the observations. Any late arrivals were recorded as they occurred. I often chatted informally with adjacent students while waiting for the start of class in order to blend in. In addition, at the end of classes, I did not exit immediately but instead continued observing, as students sometimes approached the teacher after class. On such occasions, I collected data on the sorts of questions and interactions occurring between the teachers and students. The notes taken before, during, and after each class were recorded casually, as a student would typically take notes. At some point after the notes were taken each day, I reviewed and organized the data from the observations before the coding process began. The analysis started with my observations from all four classes taught by the two teachers: Professor Grant and Professor John.

The analysis began with Professor Grant's classes, followed by my observations taken from Professor John's classes. Both the teaching styles of the teachers, and student attitudes and behaviors were noted. This data helped me develop an understanding of whether the pedagogies of the teachers match those of the students and the learning styles

of the students. I digitally recorded both the student and the teacher interviews. This allowed for maximum engagement between the participants and me and served to minimize any pauses between questions.

Classroom Observations

The focus of the classroom observations was on how students learn and interact with the teacher's style of teaching. By focusing on these aspects, through the modified version of Grubb and Gabriner's (2013) triangle of instruction, the conceptual framework of this study was used to explore the most effective pedagogical approaches taken to improve community college student remediation. Classroom observations were used to discover any emerging themes for how the students learn and respond to specific instructional practices by the teacher. The observations of the students not only included student exchanges with the teachers and the dialogues between students and teachers, but also included specific informal conversations and nonverbal language, including general behavioral patterns such as the use of cell phones and note taking.

The classes included in this study were either on a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday schedule or on a Tuesday and Thursday schedule. That is, the classes under observation were on one of these two schedules. For the observations, I spent each observation day on campus. Establishing and maintaining a rapport between researcher and participants is key to successful qualitative interviews. It is important to note that the relationships with students were informal and continuous, keeping up the appearance of being a typical student. In this capacity, I needed to maintain the status of a diligent student who took fruitful notes and attended to lectures closely.

Interviews

Classroom observations provide a raw and, for the most part, unfiltered look into classroom dynamics. However, for this study, more information was needed regarding the specific perceptions and pedagogical styles of the teachers and the perceptions of the students. Thus, in addition to classroom observations, I conducted semi-structured interviews with both teacher and student participants. These interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on the length of the answers and the speech rates of the students and teachers. Each participant was interviewed in the middle of the semester and again 6 weeks later as a follow-up.

As suggested in the conceptual framework and existing literature, an important aspect of this study was to discover the differences between what the teachers had intended for the students to learn and what exactly the students took away from the classes. Therefore, the students were questioned about how they best understood the teacher's expectations of them, the ways in which they approached their coursework and, specifically, how they assessed their learning experience in the course and their overall community college experience. In addition, many of the questions asked of the teachers and students were similar and in some cases reflected one another. This allowed me to comprehensively and thoroughly examine both similarities and differences between the teachers and their remedial students.

Data Analysis

Because this study focused on comparisons and contrasts between the student and teacher perspectives and influences of teachers (and their pedagogical styles) and students (and their learning styles), the data analysis focused on understanding both students' and teachers' perspectives of both teaching and learning. The data analysis

process started during the data collection phase when I began reviewing notes from observations. Detailed notes about the actions, behaviors, and communications were analyzed to determine the best way to categorize and further interpret the data. My field notes were used in conjunction with the data obtained from interviews to discover themes concerning the perspectives of the students and teachers.

Early in the data collection process, initial analyses were used to identify emergent, but preliminary, findings that may have improved future observations. In addition, during the informal conversations with each of the students, I was further checking, or group member checking (Creswell, 2014), students by asking them about their understandings. As the data collection phase continued, it was important to use the collection process itself to identify those parts of the study that needed further data collection, altogether there were far too much data to be gathered in the observational process. The data were carefully selected to both best represent the sample and accurately portray the beliefs and ideas held by the students under observation and during the interviews. By frequently amending and improving my data collection process through initial analyses, I was able to improve the end results.

The final analysis of data relied heavily on the coding mechanism developed for this study, further discussed in the next section. There were two primary types of analyses to be conducted for this study. The first was within-case analysis, in which I compared the results from a single case, or group (Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014). The effectiveness of this analysis type stems from its comparison of participants. Comparing participants can help develop overall themes that can be related to the groups themselves. In addition, the other type of analysis employed was cross-case analysis, in which I

compared the results between the groups. The most relevant cross-case analysis to be conducted as part of this study was a comparison of the perspectives of students with those of teachers. The interview questions were designed for both groups, which enabled a promising comparison between these two groups.

Although a concern arose that the changes in data collection in the observational stage may have led to uneven or even skewed results, I sought to maximize the accuracy of the results to minimize subjectivity. Finally, I improved the generalizability of the data obtained during observations. In this sense, any changes in the methodology, as it concerned data collection through observation, were only to improve the accuracy and validity of the results. By conducting within-case analyses of the data, I developed an understanding of the behaviors of each group. That is, by analyzing the recorded behaviors and perspectives of the students, I could determine whether specific classes had certain characteristics. The students of some classes were more open to certain pedagogical styles, whereas the students of other classes were more open to other types of pedagogical styles. I conducted within-case analyses as the data were collected. This enabled me to continuously improve the data collection methodology throughout the observational period.

Cross-case analyses enabled me to compare similarly obtained data between groups. Comparing similar types of data between groups was important for the findings to be relevant (Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014). Cross-case analyses relied heavily on the prior within-case analyses, as in most cases the results of the within-case analyses were used directly in the cross-case analyses. I anticipated that the cross-case analyses would

yield the most relevant results for this study, given that the aim of the study was to draw a comparison between teacher pedagogies and student expectations and experiences.

Coding

A coding mechanism was developed before the data collection phase of the study commenced. This mechanism had thematic indicators that had the data coded by theme for each data input. The data collected from both the interviews and the observations were coded in similar ways. It is important to note that the end results reflected accurate interpretation of collected data. Thus, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and assessed for consistency and accuracy. The interview transcripts were coded with a particular eye for “patterns of behavior, subjects’ ways of thinking, and events repeat[ing] and [or] stand[ing] out” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 173).

The coding procedures for the data closely followed Perun’s (2014) approach but differed based on the participant responses. The transcriptions of the interviews were categorized by type of answer, by type of remedial class, by class size, and so forth. The 11 categories of data discovered by Perun, and largely used in this study, are the following:

1. High school comparisons: descriptions from students about how their remedial educational experiences differ from their high school experiences.
2. Student strategies: specific student efforts to pass courses.
3. Teaching–learning literacy practices: how-to directions for college-level reading and writing.
4. Hard work: high degree of efforts expressed in answers.
5. Teacher feedback: relying on specific feedback from teachers.

6. Authority: expressions of authority from one group over another.
7. Teacher interest in student success: descriptions of teacher being interested in student success.
8. Right–wrong: descriptions in terms of right or wrong, correct or incorrect, or broken or fixed.
9. Student experience with academics: expressed difficulty or ease with learning specific material or skill.
10. Classroom resistance: student resisting authority, directions, or teaching.
11. Teaching philosophy: teacher teaching practices.

Every response taken during the interviews and observed in classrooms did not fall perfectly into every one of these categories. Patterns and themes that emerged in each category were also recorded as they were discovered.

Validity

Threats to validity often undermine findings revealed through the analysis of observational data. To ensure validity of collected data and data analysis, I deliberately gathered, analyzed, and interpreted information only through means consistent with an earnest attempt to understand and compare accurately the relevant perspectives of students and teachers. There were many features of the research design that sought to maximize validity while minimizing researcher bias. For example, the member-checking processes helped ensure that the results presented were objective and that the study design remained valid throughout the research process (Creswell, 2014).

To minimize threats to validity, my approach in this study was based on the conceptual framework of the study. Even in approaching the observational data-

gathering portion of this study, I framed the processes of the study based on the aforementioned triangle of instruction. My perspective remained objective throughout both the data collection and analyses phases of the study. Although there was no cohort with which to verify data, I attempted to accurately record and analyze the data, coding the information relevantly and without bias. Although the research questions in this study are important to me in my development of the study, I was open to amending the questions and the data sought in the observational period according to the initial data collected. Although this was unnecessary, I was highly sensitive in my approach to the data presented by the students and the teachers.

Limitations

As previously noted, there were a number of potential limitations to the design of this study and the methodology employed. The first was that a single researcher was conducting the observational research. In some sense, this meant that there was only one perspective in which the data were interpreted. Second and related, the same researcher who collected the data, including conducting the interviews and gathering observational data, also analyzed the collected data. Thus, there was another point of entry for researcher bias.

Another limitation to this study was that the students who were the most outgoing might have been those who were most likely to contribute to the observational data in the study. This is because such students were more likely than introverted students to interact with the teacher and peer students. Perhaps the introverted students preferred to interact with the teacher through email or one-on-one during office hours. Thus, outgoing students may have been overrepresented in the data and introverted students

may have been underrepresented. However, the multiple classroom observations conducted during this study may have helped to overcome this potential source of unintended data manipulation. I attempted to ensure that the resulting data were not skewed by the overrepresentation of outgoing students.

The Roles of the Researcher in Qualitative Research

My roles in this study were observer, data collector, and data analyzer. In these capacities, I both collected and analyzed the data for thematic content. As a classroom observer, my role was to blend into the classroom and give the appearance of being a student. I arrived before class and observed the behaviors of students as they prepared for class to begin. Once class began, I focused attention more on the note-taking details and conversations that the students were having with the teacher. At the end of each class, I remained seated and continued observing student interactions, especially those that the students were having with the teacher. I actively attempted to engage with and observe many students in the classroom to help maximize generalizability. In contrast, as an interviewer, my role was professional and much more direct. I conducted the interviews thoroughly but quickly.

My research in the field of remedial education began during my first year as a doctoral student. Under the tutelage of Dr. Rebecca Cox, who has shared with me information about her research processes, findings, and theoretical approaches concerning remedial education, I have developed a strong understanding of learning and teaching patterns, especially those of remedial education. My inspiration for this project, in addition to Dr. Cox's work, was the relative lack of success for many remedial education programs. This alarming finding has led me to follow in the pursuit of

improvements to such programs. With the literature showing support for pedagogical alignment being associated with success among remedial students, I decided to continue the process of developing an understanding of the actual alignment of pedagogical approaches to learning and teaching through classroom observations and interviews. Additionally, there is relatively little data on the actual connection between remedial students and teacher pedagogy, warranting further exploration.

Chapter IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study sought to examine the perceptions of both students and teachers, in remedial English reading and writing classes at a community college. By extending Cox's earlier studies (2004) and using Jenkins' study (2011) as a resource, the present study assessed the learning attitudes and perspectives of students enrolled in remedial education at a community college and explicated how students learn best. In an attempt to use a similar approach to Cox's (2009) study, this study sought to look at students' learning experiences in remedial English classes in a Northeastern urban community college, one heavily attended by racial and ethnic minority students, as well as being and post-Common Core, No Child Left Behind, and other elementary and secondary educational reform initiatives implemented throughout the country. Many of these reforms changed the standards for education and instituted a testing process that makes it more difficult for students to score well on placement tests, often resulting in the inaccurate placement of students into remedial education (Perun, 2014). Using different types of tests, a wider assessment protocol, and measures such as the GPA may be more effective for college placement (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). To further study what works in the classroom to effectively teach remedial students, based on student and teacher perceptions, I conducted classroom observations and one-on-one interviews with 14 participants (2 teachers and 12 students) to gain a deeper understanding of what takes place in community college remedial classes. The information gathered from the classroom observations bolstered the evidence from the interviews to provide a more

comprehensive view of perceptions about the educational success of community college students in remedial courses.

To provide clear insight into what took place in the classrooms in this study, this chapter then explores the three prevalent themes that emerged from the interview data, observation notes, and a review of documents. The primary themes noted, as adapted from Perun's (2014) approach, were (a) the varied academic experiences of students in remedial community college programs depending on the teacher, (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success, and (c) inconsistent teaching practices. The identified themes, when integrated with one another, provide a descriptive and holistic understanding of what can take place in remedial classes and further help to draw conclusions to answer the research questions posed in this study.

Setting

The major urban area that hosts the college is in an economically disadvantaged area of the city, with safety issues being a concern. It was difficult to find the classrooms I observed, as the place seemed like a maze. The remedial classrooms were in the basement, where the hallways were gloomy—the old cinderblock style—and unadorned. In the classrooms themselves, there was no chalk with which to write on the chalkboards, the walls appeared to need a fresh coat of paint, and everything seemed to be worn out and old. Despite the assertion that they have state of the art facilities, it seemed the college was lacking in newer technology, at least within the classrooms in that building. There were no dry erase boards or markers, no smart boards; overall, it was not set up in a manner that was student friendly.

Participant Overview

Two teachers and 12 students participated in face-to-face interviews. The selection criteria for the teachers were that they (a) were teachers of either remedial English reading or writing and that they (b) did not have overly high failure rates for students (e.g., at least average passing rates for students, which is roughly 8%) (Collegeview, 2015). Participants generally ranged in age from 18-40 in the study, and were in one of the two sections available for each class. Class sections tended to be light as the college typically experiences lower summer enrollment, approximately 50% lower (Collegeview, 2015).

Notes from Observation

The focus of the classroom observations was on how students learn and interact with the teacher. By focusing on these aspects, I attempted to determine the pedagogical approaches taken and identify emerging themes for how the students learn and respond to specific instructional practices of the teacher. During the classroom observations, I looked for engaging teaching methods that were developed in the relationships between the teachers and the students.

Generally, I arrived early to each class in order to best observe students without interrupting them or negatively influencing the classroom observations. I recorded late arrivals of students (usually three or four students per class were late) as they occurred, and I chatted informally with adjacent students while waiting for the start of class. In part, this was a means to blend in, but I also wanted to learn more about the students as well. I sat in the back left-hand corner of the classroom to be able to see everything that was taking place and to be able to leave if the need arose. At the end of classes, I did not

leave the classroom immediately but instead stayed for a while as some students approached the class and talked amongst one another. I took field notes on what I observed. I tried to do it in a casual manner, as a student would typically take notes. The review of the findings begins with my observations from all four sections of the two classes Professor Grant and Professor John taught. The analysis begins with Professor Grant's classes, followed by my observations taken from Professor John's classes. Both the teaching styles of the teachers and student attitudes and behaviors are noted.

Two Teachers: Student Attitudes and Behaviors

Professor Grant's Classes

Professor Grant, a middle aged, married, White male with two children, also teaches English in a local high school. He was familiar with teaching at the community college, as he had taught remedial English classes there in the past. The primary focus of his 001 English class was on reading; nonetheless, he taught grammar and writing as well. The class ran for three hours between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m. four times a week, and the textbook for the course, *College Reading: Houghton Mifflin English for Academic Success* by Benz (2006), cost \$111. For Professor Grant's two sections, the majority of the students were African American (59%), while the Hispanic population was 24%. The third highest group represented in the class was the international student group (11%), followed by the White student population at 6%. Women outnumbered the men 55% to 45%. The students ranged in age from 18 to 40, and there were approximately 10 students enrolled between the two sections due to low summer enrollment (Collegeview, 2015).

Teaching Style

In both sections of Professor Grant's remedial English class, his method of teaching was from the textbook, chapter by chapter. Given that most of the students did not have the textbook, the teacher made copies so that they could all follow along. Professor Grant read aloud, and the students read aloud as well. Professor Grant asked leading questions about the readings to engage the students further by having them try to discern what would happen next in the story, and they responded accordingly.

The classes ran for the entire three hours. Professor Grant seemed to have a good relationship with the students, as they talked and joked together before and after classes. He asked about their children (for those that had them), work, vacations, etc. This took place primarily at the beginning of class, which seemed to effectively "break the ice" and made the students feel welcome. Afterwards, he typically wrote on the board a list of what he was going to cover in class on a given day.

Usually the classes consisted of going over assigned readings. For example, on the day I first observed in the classroom, the students were reading *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom. Professor Grant spent time teaching the motifs and symbolism found within the book, and the class was analyzing the reading to decipher where in the story the following appeared:

- Foreshadowing
- Darkness versus Light
- Character
- Themes
- Color

Professor Grant shared a personal story, as it related to the story being read, and asked many questions about the reading. He also did a lot of recapping. This teaching strategy was apparent in both of Professor Grant's classes and appeared to help the students' understanding of the reading, as the teacher was very thorough in his explanations. Although the attendance varied from class to class, there were generally 80% of the students present for each class, although not always the same students. For those in attendance, the majority did seem to understand the readings based on their comments and questions. For example, by the end of the entire course, and as part of the Mitch Albom reading, a student in front of me raised his hand and asked, "Why didn't Eddie get to learn that while he was alive?" in reference to the main character learning something about himself after death. I also heard a comment at the end of the semester about how beautiful the book was. When there were difficult words in the story, those that some students had trouble with, the teacher would stop while reading and help break down the meaning of the words. Professor Grant also provided read-along strategies where students each had an opportunity to take turns reading aloud, also providing students with the opportunity to read along silently as others took their turns. Paying such close attention to detail can be especially helpful when teaching about the symbolism and motifs used in a story.

In an example of how Professor Grant handled tests in class, he created a PowerPoint presentation to be used in preparation for the test, complete with notes on that particular story. The presentation was sent to the students via email prior to the test. He also provided a full review on the board the day before the test. The teacher's grading policy was clearly laid out in the syllabus. Professor Grant used a simple point grading

system. The highest number of points a student could achieve was 1,000, which was equivalent to an “A” in the class. Assignments, attendance, and participation were weighted so that students would have to participate on all levels to receive a passing grade of a “C” or above. The grading system seemed fair and he followed it accordingly.

Student Attitudes and Behaviors

The student attitudes and behaviors in Professor Grant’s classes varied. Certain students were often not engaged in learning. At times, common behaviors exhibited by students who were disengaged include texting, writing, keeping their heads down, and staring at their papers. For instance, when asked a question, they often did not know where they were supposed to be in the reading and could not answer Professor Grant’s question. These disengaged behaviors were most apparent earlier in the semester and seemed to diminish when the teacher verbally stressed how lack of participation would affect their grade. Sharing this, along with continuously asking the students questions, appeared to encourage the students to participate more, as they were able to answer the teacher’s questions more effectively towards the end of the semester. Frequently, at least three different students left the class for extended periods of time, or arrived late (sometimes an hour late), or were absent for class. I never attended a class where all the students attended at the same time, and there were frequently two or three students missing in each class period on any given day. The teacher made it clear that the attendance policy was strict, and that those students who did not comply would receive a reduction in their grade by at least 10%.

There were other disruptions as well. One 23-year-old African American woman brought her two-year-old child to one of the classes, and this caused considerable

disruption. The toddler ran around the classroom and the mother struggled to keep him under control. At the start of the semester, many of the class members were not truly engaged in many of the class sessions, as seen in their inability to answer questions when asked; and they appeared as though they truly did not understand the material being presented. Only a few students could answer Professor Grant's questions, such as, "What do you think the author means when he says belief?" or "Why is repetition being used in this story?" One student did not know the difference between a subject and a verb. Nevertheless, later on in the semester more students (roughly 70% versus 30%) were engaged with the material and with what the teacher was teaching. They seemed interested in the course content by paying better attention to what was taking place in the book, and by answering questions more appropriately when asked. Much of what was lacking earlier on in the class was not due to the teacher's lack of effort but rather due to students' disengagement in remedial classes, sometimes a consequence of not having needs met in earlier schooling, a disability of some sort, the desire to simply "get through the class," or simply the belief that they were not "smart enough" to understand. Professor Grant made the students feel as though they were fully capable of understanding the material through his patient and encouraging manner.

Professor John's Classes

In Professor John's classes, a middle-aged, single White male, the focus was on writing and his English 002 classes were those that followed 001 (taught by Professor Grant during the time of this study). This was Professor John's first class teaching at a college, or teaching English generally. This class was also structured to run for three hours between 2:00pm and 5:00pm, Monday through Thursday, and the textbook for the

course, *College Writing Skills with Readings* by Langan (2013) cost \$85. For Professor John's classes, African American students were also the highest proportion of the two sections at 62%. Hispanic students ranked second in Professor John's classes at 23%. The only significant difference, in terms of race from Professor Grant's classes, was that there were fewer international students in Professor John's classes. They came in at 7% and the White student percentage was 8%. Women in Professor John's classes also outnumbered the men 57% to 43% (Collegeview, 2015). The students ranged in age from 18 to 40, and there were approximately 10 students enrolled between the two sections—again due to lower summer enrollment—only about half of the student numbers for a typical fall or spring semester (Collegeview, 2015).

Teaching Style

Professor John plainly stated on the first day of the class that the goal of his courses were to “get you (students) to pass the course so you can move on to next level. My job is to get you to write well enough to get to 101,” despite never having taught an English class before. Nevertheless, he came in with a positive attitude. He shared openly with the students that he cared about them and that he did not want anyone to be afraid in his classes. As an example, he told the students in one class session, “We all go through hard stuff; I just want you guys to feel comfortable.” Professor John went over the syllabus and said that he would modify it if students did not understand something. It was a somewhat limited syllabus and lacked exact dates for paper due dates. On the first day of classes, he also mentioned that attendance was optional, as long as all of the work was completed by the end of the semester. He told both of his class sections that he understood that the students had other responsibilities. The classes were supposed to last

a total of three hours; nevertheless, they generally ended within one hour. At the start of classes, Professor John asked how everyone's weekend was and often shared a lot about himself and his own experiences. In this way there was a social connection established, although limited on the sharing done by students. As the classes progressed, they started to discuss current events. In one class, a 26-year old Hispanic student asked Professor John where he could find information on current events, yet the teacher seemed not to hear him and did not answer the question. Later the student told me that he felt, "blown off" by the teacher.

With writing, Professor John discussed the pros and cons of their papers, talked about how to use MS Word, how to use spell check, and explained what the squiggly line under a word means in Word programs. Professor John appeared to be very relaxed and often said, "It's OK" about the students' misspellings. He tried to explain the difference between **woman** and **women** (count versus non-count nouns), yet the students had a difficult time understanding this concept, as evidenced in continuous errors on their papers. Professor John also explained run-on sentences, as he said he saw so many of them in their work. When he explained the mid-term exam, a two page, five-paragraph essay on current events, the students were confused, given that class conversations often vacillated between past and current events. The teacher's specific instructions were as follows:

- Students can pick their topic (current events).
- If students complete the written assignments and exhibit good writing, even if they go off topic, he will give them an "A" because of the growth in their writing.
- Students will not be marked down for "silly errors" due to not using spell check.

Despite Professor John's instructions, the students in general struggled with the topic of current events (e.g., what topic to pick, where to find information, and how to write about it). One student, Maria said that the teacher seemed like "he wasn't really there all the time." Professor John sometimes seemed distracted and unfocused, and he frequently shifted topics mid-conversation. By the end of one of the classes in which he was assigning the midterm, he still had not decided on the due date for the paper. Jokingly he said to the whole class, "OK, it's due tomorrow." Professor John did assign homework to the students to think about their topics instead of directly addressing the question about the due date. He did tell the students that he would model two paragraphs on the board the next class period and show them how they should begin their paper. The class ended without an exact due date being settled.

With regard to his grading policies, he seemed very unstructured. His syllabus included a general "subject to change" policy about grading, but he was unclear in his actual instructions regarding policy. He did not have a clearly delineated grade point policy on the syllabus. It read that to get an "A," a student's overall score needed to be between 90% and 100%. Accordingly, a "B" was 80% to 89%, and so on. Based on conversations I had with some students in his class about late papers, and how Professor John told them that they "should not worry," it seemed that students could do their best or their worst and that it would not matter. As discussed more fully below, the majority of the students received an "A"s in Professor John's classes (93%), regardless of their level of proficiency.

Student Attitudes and Behaviors

Many of the responses and behaviors exhibited by the students in Professor John's

classes were reflective of students being disengaged or confused. Many seemed not to really want to be in the class, but rather wanting to just “get through it.” Students frequently came in late; as many as six in each class period I attended did not come at all, roughly 30% in each class. Many used their cell phones for various purposes. Students also listened to music, watched movies, or simply stared into space during class. For example, Benasha, an African American student did not know what the teacher meant when he said, “How’s the work going?” Here and there, students listened to what the teacher had to say in the classes, but generally it seemed as if the students did whatever they wanted. From my observations, Professor John did not ask the students to focus and went on talking, sometimes about schoolwork and sometimes about life in general. This was similar in all classes I attended where Professor John taught, no matter at what point in the semester the class was being held. It appeared that the students reflected the teacher’s own disengaged behavior.

Classroom Observations: Students versus Teachers

After observing both of Professor Grant’s classes and the students’ responses and behaviors in at least three individual class sessions (for a total of six), I surmised that Professor Grant was generally a good teacher and that the students respected him as such. Clearly, certain students showed either a lack of interest, a lackadaisical attitude about timeliness or about attending class and did not fully comprehend the material (as much as 60 or 70% of the students exhibited this towards the beginning of class, and as few as 30% or 40% exhibited this towards the end of the class). These findings were consistent in both of Professor Grant’s classes. Professor Grant did as much as he could to help the students to engage, encourage them to attend class, and learn from the material.

In contrast, Professor John did not seem to be a good teacher, at least not for the group of students he taught during the summer session. During my class observations, I saw that he did not engage with the students at the academic level, and he was not fully engaging with them socially. For example, Professor John engaged in conversation with the students before or after class, in both sections, but mostly he told stories about himself and shared personal experiences during these times. Frequently, they were success stories, something learned after having gone through a difficult experience. The students' responses to Professor John as a person seemed consistent with the student's reactions to his teaching methods as well in that they appeared to be bored and disinterested. He avoided answering questions directly when they were related to the class reading, and he made the writing rules as he went along. At one point, he noted that the best time to use commas was "when it felt right."

Students also showed a lack of interest and often misunderstood what, if anything, was being taught and this did not improve throughout the semester. In fact, many grew more confused as to how to write a good essay as the semester progressed. Professor John did not seem to be truly interested in teaching the students or engaging them in the pursuit of academic achievement, and they often turned to one another in confusion. For instance, one day in class the teacher said the essays were due the next class as a joke. However, a number of students did not understand that he was joking. For this group of students, who may already be experiencing some trepidation about college given their remedial level, not being serious about academic work was not appropriate, at least not according to one disgruntled young man with whom I spoke. Professor John's general

mode of operation seemed to be a desire to make it easy for himself and be thought well of.

During one interaction at the end of the semester in which I stood outside of Professor John's classroom chatting with one of the students that I had interviewed, she noted that she was behind on three papers. Yet, she was not concerned, as the teacher had told her not to worry and to bring the papers to him whenever she finished them. These students experienced a disservice by not being taught the skills they needed to succeed in college and beyond. Additionally, they failed to learn in the appropriate manner in order to do well in subsequent remedial English classes. For example, I had a chance to look at the students' writing samples. One student, Maria, showed me a paper she had written halfway through the semester and then another at the end of the semester. Both had few corrections on them and the writing looked very similar in terms of mistakes in subject and verb agreement, run-on sentences, and problems with punctuation.

Classroom Observations: Teachers versus Teachers

In comparing Professor Grant's 001 classes (Sections 01 and 02) and Professor John's 002 classes (Sections 01 and 02), many differences surfaced. Professor Grant's class had more structure, the students were more engaged, and he taught for the whole three hours. He marked students down, or up, for both attendance and participation. Professor Grant provoked thinking in his students, recapped, explained, and yet left certain portions of the texts open to the student's personal interpretation. More of the students were focused on learning in his classes as the semester progressed and the classes never faltered in their structure or strategy throughout the entire semester. Rules

surrounding work deadlines and attendance were adhered to throughout the semester. Professor Grant provided feedback (e.g., sentence structure, grammar, reading strategies, etc.), which helped students learn the class materials throughout the semester. For example, in the earlier portion of the semester, a student, Jesse, did not want to read aloud because he was embarrassed, so another student read for him. Jesse, an 18-year-old African American student, appeared to be very shy; yet by the end of class, he was reading aloud.

Many students who were initially disengaged were actively participating in the classes by the close of the semester, due to consistent encouragement and an adherence to class structure provided by Professor Grant. While the change did not take place overnight, the gradual shift in student interest and participation increased. Students in Professor Grant's classes received grades that ranged from an "A" to an "F." In assessing the results from both sections, 23% of the students received an A, 41% a B, 19% a C, 12% a D, and 5% an F, based on the work and effort they put forth into the classes. Professor Grant did the best he could to engage and teach the students, and they often responded accordingly.

On the other hand, Professor John appeared too lax in his approach to teaching remedial English classes. He often taught for less than an hour out of the three hours for which he was responsible, and he did not hold students accountable for their attendance or participation. He often failed to answer students' questions, and from reading Maria's papers, it was clear that she had not learned very much in Professor John's class. Professor John ended classes three days before the official end of class, and six out of his ten students still had yet to turn in three or four assignments. Three of these students had

planned to submit all of their papers a few days after the end of the semester. According to the teacher, they were still able to receive “A’s” and “B’s” in the classes. Some students seemed fine with not being challenged to learn more. However, for those students who did turn in papers on time, they did not receive feedback or corrections in their work. In their own words, students agreed that the work was too easy and that they “didn’t learn much.”

As is evident, the pedagogical approaches taken by Professor Grant and Professor John were starkly different. Professor Grant seemed committed to teaching his students, whereas Professor John seemed in it more for money and maybe to boost his self-image as being the person who is helping disadvantaged students. The role that teachers play in their pedagogical approaches makes a significant difference in student success in remedial education. If a teacher’s approach is sound, student-centered, structured, and thorough, students can embrace the learning materials more completely. However, if a teacher’s pedagogical approach is unsound, not student centered, unstructured, and lacks thoroughness, students will not experience the full benefits of being engaged with the learning. In this study, students responded well to Professor Grant’s methods, but not to Professor John’s. Receiving a good education for remedial students is important, given that they are already starting at a disadvantage. Students in remedial classes often come from areas that have fewer financial resources, which tends to lead to reduced opportunities for a thorough education. As a result, many students must begin college at the remedial level to “catch up” on what was missed due to limited financial resources. Nevertheless, students in Professor Grant’s classes did appear to have learned a lot by the end of the semester, as opposed to students in Professor John’s classes.

In the context of this study, the field notes provided first hand observational knowledge of both Professor Grant's and Professor John's approaches in the classrooms and to the students' responses and general behavior in the classes as well. Analyzing the findings by comparing teacher versus students, and also teacher versus teacher, to assess the differences in the teaching styles of the two teachers revealed that Professor Grant's approach was more effective than Professor John's. Professor Grant had rules, a clear intent to teach reading and writing, and there were consequences if the students did not put effort into the class. The way Professor Grant seemed to feel about his role, as an educator was consistent with what the students thought of him; namely, that he was a good teacher. The observations I made in the classes were also in line with what the students perceived in Professor John's classes. From what I observed, Professor John did not give the students the full benefit of receiving a sound remedial education. He seemed very lax in his approach, did not have many rules or consequences for the students, and did not spend time teaching them how to actually write well. Overall, the quality of teaching between the two teachers' remedial English classes was not consistent, nor did all students have their educational needs met.

The remaining part of the chapter explores the three prevalent themes that emerged from the interview data, field notes, and a review of documents: (a) the academic experience of students in remedial community college programs varied depending on the teacher, (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success, and (c) inconsistent teaching practices.

Interviews

Through interviews conducted with a total of 12 students, all who participated in the remedial English classes taught by Professor Grant and Professor John, several themes emerged. These are presented below through the interview data gathered on all 12 students. For the sake of confidentiality, the students who are presented below are introduced as Candice, Leshawn, Jesse, Alex, Alicia, and Missy in Professor Grant's sections, and Maria, William, David, Benasha, Jalynda, and Haley in Teachers John's sections. The student's responses to the interview questions are presented and grouped according to the emergent themes, following an introduction to all 12 students interviewed.

Students from Professor Grant's Classes

Candice

Candice is a 23-year-old single African American woman with a four-year-old little girl, whom she sometimes has to bring to class. Both she and her daughter live with her mother, close enough to the college campus to almost walk there from her house. She graduated a year late from high school due to her pregnancy, and she is in school now to become educated and find a viable career. She realizes that she must be able to support herself and her daughter and that she has a better chance of doing this with an education. Candice is capable but missed some of the basics in public school due to frequently being caught up in the culture of which she was a part. Gangs, drugs, and violence were common in her neighborhood, and friends and boyfriends often distracted her during high school. Candice shared with me that she struggled with getting to school regularly and that she may have a learning disability of some sort (undiagnosed). Nonetheless, she

feels she has matured considerably and wishes to change her life and give her daughter a better future. In her own words: “Having a baby made me grow up some. No one’s gonna do it for me—she needs a mom.” Candice also wanted to be able to help her mother as she gets older and feels that she is tired of living with all the “crazy.”

Leshaun

Leshaun is a married, 40-year-old African American student returning to education after many years. He is currently a security officer, but he wants to study sociology and education. After struggling to get his GED (he did not graduate from high school), Leshaun did what most men in his family did and found some type of blue-collar job, went to church, got married, and had children. He and his wife have five children; the youngest was in fourth grade at the time of the study. However, since the economy took its downturn, he lost a good job as a supervisor at a plant; and his wife was not earning enough money to support the whole family. This made him realize he needed to do something, and he enrolled in the community college. Although Leshaun is bright, he feels his earlier years in high school were “a long time ago,” and he has forgotten many of the basics. He is now back in school to make a difference in his life and in the lives of those around him—he hopes both “professionally and personally.”

Jesse

Jesse is a shy 18-year-old African-American man. His single mother and grandmother raised him, and he says that he was always kind of a loner in school. He is an only child, and says he has only “a few friends.” He currently lives at home with his mother; his grandmother passed away about a year ago. He describes himself as “just a guy trying to make it,” who wants to get a good-paying job and have a family someday.

His goals are to work in a field related to technology and computers, as he has always been interested in both hardware and software. He feels that he can repair or build just about anything related to computers. While he was not a good student academically in high school (although he did graduate), he knows he has talent with computers. He hopes that taking remedial classes will help him get to where he wants to go.

Alex

Alex is a 26-year-old Hispanic man with diagnosed dyslexia. He said that due to his disability, he struggled to get through high school. He did have an Individualized Education Plan, and he believes those services helped him. However, it left him feeling “different” in school, and he has had to work harder than some others to succeed in life. Another issue that he dealt with growing up was that his parents spoke only Spanish at home. While he was born in Mexico, his parents moved here from Mexico shortly after he was born. While Alex is certainly proud of his heritage and is taking classes to relearn the language of his family, which was lost along the way, he also views the language issue as a barrier. He believes if he had had the support of English-speaking parents and older siblings, it would have been easier for him to succeed in school. Though he continues to struggle in his classes, he is determined to do well in school, and he wants to work as a social worker in his community.

Alicia

Alicia is a 20-year-old Hispanic woman who is in school to become a lawyer. Alicia is a native Spanish speaker who moved to the United States with her family five years ago. She is originally from Mexico and likes living in the United States. Although she is very much a part of the Mexican community, she wishes to also become more a

part of the “White” community. Alicia is driven, and feels that she could play an important role as a lawyer. Part of her desire to become a lawyer stems from coming from a background of poverty in Mexico. In the United States she hopes to “make good money” to help support her family, both here and back in Mexico. While she wishes she were further ahead in her education, she understands that not having spoken English for the first 15 years of her life can be detrimental to accelerating in school. Yet, she remains optimistic.

Missy

Missy is a 24-year-old White woman. She married her boyfriend of five years at 18 years of age, and they had a son. Missy has been diagnosed with ADHD and said this condition kept her from doing well in school. She dropped out of high school at the age of 16 and worked at her father’s car wash. She recently earned a GED, and she wants to do more than work at the car wash. She says that she loves to write and to be creative, but she has a difficult time getting good grades and taking tests. Therefore, she worries about passing her classes. Nonetheless, she is determined to succeed in school, and she is interested in journalism. She hopes that she and her husband will be able to provide a good life for their son by trying their best.

Students from Professor John’s Classes

Maria

Maria is a 28-year old Hispanic student originally from Mexico. She and her family arrived in the United States when she was 12 years old. Their entire family did not speak English, and assimilating to U.S. culture was a challenge for the family. Maria learned English when she started school, but she still wanted to remember her Mexican identity. She shared that she was “so happy” to have come to the United States, even

though it was hard. She also said that if she had come when she was younger, like her little sister, Anna, who was 10 years old at that time, she might not want to be Mexican anymore and perhaps she would not have cared as much about being from another culture. Maria said she wanted to fit in and do well in school and still be Mexican, but she felt if she had been a speaker of English, especially a *native* speaker of English, it would have been much easier for her to do well in school and not have to be in remedial English classes. While Maria still struggles in her classes, she knows she wants to work with students somehow and is committed to the process.

William

William is a 20-year-old African American man who earned his GED after dropping out of school at 14. He comes from a very economically disadvantaged background and dropped out of school early because he “didn’t see the point” of getting an education. At that time, he believed himself to be stupid and thought that running scams on local businesses with his older brothers would make him some money. After two of his three older brothers were arrested and went to jail (they were both over 18 at that time), he decided that maybe he should try to get his GED. William struggled quite a bit to learn what was needed to pass the test, even with a free program that was available to him. Yet, he kept at it, and after two years he was able to take the test, pass, and get his GED. What he realized along the way was that “I’m not stupid.” After being encouraged by his mother, he decided to go to community college. As of yet, he is not sure what he wants to do, but he has discovered that he loves to read and learn new things.

Jalynda

Jalynda is a single 32-year-old African-American woman who got into trouble with drugs and the law when she was younger. She grew up in the inner city and was exposed to a lot of violence, drugs, and drinking. Her parents both struggled with their own addictions, and a fair number of her family members have been in and out of jail. Within the last two years, she also spent some time incarcerated, and she is now back out and trying to “get her life together.” After having experienced the darker side of life, she has realized that she wants something different for herself. Someday she also hopes to spend time as a wife and mother. She wants to give her children something different from what she experienced as a child. She wants to be a teacher. Having come from such a tough background, she feels that she has a lot to offer children living in the inner city, and she also wants a career that will sustain her future family.

Benasha

Benasha is a 19-year-old African American woman. She comes from a big family with five children, and she lives with her mother and her two older sisters. Some of her siblings are in college, and some of them are experiencing difficulties with drugs and alcohol. One of Benasha’s greatest fears is that she will turn out like her sister who is on drugs and in and out of jail. This is a sister she does not live with, but her sister’s behavior does affect the whole family. She is going to school to be a business major and wants to own her own restaurant someday. Cooking is one of her passions. She also wants to learn Spanish and is interested in working with people from different countries. Benasha graduated from high school but with poor grades. She always struggled in school; therefore, she is grateful to be having the opportunity to try again.

David

David is a 45-year-old White male. He lost his job in the economic downturn, and decided to go back to school to try to find a new career. He worked primarily in construction. When the housing boom subsided, he was left with a reduced income. He is divorced and he has two children that he sees on the weekends. He wants to be able to provide for his children and perhaps get full custody of them at some point. He is not sure what he wants to do yet, but he knows he has to refresh his knowledge, especially in grammar and writing.

Haley

Haley is a 20-year-old white female who grew up very poor. She recalls moving frequently due to her father's lapsing jobs, and she wants to have a "normal" life. She did relatively well in school but feels that she did not focus on getting the best grades she could have gotten. She believes she could do very well in school now. Nevertheless, she is very nervous, having fears about math and writing. She wants to be a dental assistant and hopes she can do well enough in her remedial classes to be able to begin the dental program. She is aware that she will need support, and understands the type of work required in college; she already spends time at both the writing and math lab.

Review of the Themes

Through a detailed analysis of the data gathered from interviewing the 12 students introduced, common themes were sought out pertaining to the perceptions of students and teachers in remedial community college English reading and writing classes (Appendix E). Utilizing the themes adapted from Perun's (2014) approach, I identified three emergent themes: (a) the varied academic experience of students in remedial community

college programs depending on the teacher, (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success, and (c) inconsistent teaching practices. A brief summary will follow each theme along with the related interview excerpts.

Theme 1: The Academic Experience of Students Varied

When asking students earlier in the semester about their feelings about the classes and the teachers teaching them, these are some of the responses elicited. These responses point to a mix of student reactions to both the classes themselves and to the teachers who taught them. According to Maria, a student in one of Professor John's 002 sections, she conveyed the following:

If you didn't understand anything, he would explain again; and it didn't really bother him. So I feel like that's why I like remedial classes. Because I feel like they explain a lot, and they give you a lot of attention.

Although she felt that her remedial class gave her the individualized attention she needed and it was not too difficult, her sentiments seemed to shift somewhat over time. Toward the end of the semester, when I had another opportunity to sit down with Maria and hear her thoughts about the class, her feelings had changed somewhat from being comfortable that she would learn the material in the correct manner to not being sure that she did learn what she was supposed to about writing. The following is what she had to say about being taught in the remedial English class:

I mean writing is a little bit more clear to me than it was before. Again, you have come up with this—with schools that have made you try to write one way, like, oh, you have to do this. For instance, do this and this and this. So it's completely different. It's so much easier now. I think he just wants us to know how to write.

Essentially, Maria appeared to feel okay regarding what she learned in Professor John's class, yet she was still lacking some of the basic skills needed to write a more formal essay. Her end-of-the-semester writing skills were improperly taught by her teacher, as evidenced in the structural and grammatical mistakes I noted in looking over one of Maria's final essays. Nevertheless, when probing further about whether or not she believed she learned what she needed to learn in the class, she replied, "Yeah, I think so. Mm-hm" in an uncertain tone of voice. This seemed to reflect that even though she felt she knew more about writing than she had at the onset of the class, she was not convinced that she had learned to write in the correct manner. Her feelings regarding this were also affirmed in our final conversation where she said, "Well, yeah, I guess I can write better, but I'm not sure if he really taught us the rules." However, some of her uncertainty about having learned to write in the correct way may have been compounded by her own admission that she "should have come to class more frequently and participated more."

Generally, Professor John's class was regarded by many as "easy" because he was lax about attendance, about turning in assignments in a timely manner, and about using correct grammar and structure in the writing assignments. Some of the students seemed to prefer this lax attitude, but many did not. This is what William said about the class when asked how he believed he had performed in the remedial English class:

It wasn't hard at all. We didn't do too much reading. I mean the reading we did from the book. I just, like I said, complete the midterms and stuff. That wasn't hard at all. Mostly we did was on trying to work on our grammar and punctuation when it came to writing.

Alternately, Lashaun shared a different sentiment about being a student in

Professor Grant's class. While he felt that he was learning a lot in the class, he also felt some embarrassment at needing to be in a remedial class. He shared the following:

I feel like—I kind of feel degraded. Maybe it's my own fault because I didn't finish school and I could have got it done there. But if you look at some of the things we're learning now, when I go home, my son in third grade, fourth grade, he's learning algebra now. So I'm kind of thinking back on when I was young, it was things; and I caught up to where we needed to be now, and I kind of looked back and said, wow, I'm kind of on the same math level and reading level as my son. You get what I'm saying? That's kind of degrading to me or kind of disappointing.

Although Lashaun felt embarrassment around having to be in remedial college classes, he did not find them overly difficult and indicated that he felt Professor Grant was “a good teacher.” When asked what was most challenging about the class for him, this is how he responded:

So I'd say go on the computer and do certain things, [inaudible]. I think that's the most nerve-wracking. And making sure you're meeting the financial aid – there's a lot of – I'm highly organized, so when it comes to class, that's easy and I'm learning. But it's just the other stuff around class that's hard.

Summary of Theme 1

Assessment of these responses, based on the theme of varied student experience of a remedial program, was mixed. For most students, at any level, they seemed to feel as though both of the sections that Professor John taught were easy, at least perceptually. As the semester progressed, most students (96%) continued to find the class easy, and

some liked this aspect of Professor John's class. Yet, for those students who had historically struggled, Professor John's seemingly easy class may have been a disservice. Later, portions of the interview material suggest that this may be the result of not really being taught the material. This is somewhat reflected in Maria's case. When asked if she had learned much in Professor John's class, her response was uncertain and unenthusiastic about how much she had learned in the class. This was supported by William's response to the class as well. In Professor Grant's class, Lashaun felt that it was an easy class, despite the embarrassment he may have felt at having to "start over." Nonetheless, he appeared to be an exceptionally bright student; and as seen further along in the study, it appears as though Professor Grant's classes were sufficiently challenging for most of the students who attended.

Theme 2: Teachers' Inconsistent Level of Interest in Student Success

In an analysis of both teachers, they seemed to hold different viewpoints on teaching remedial courses and their interest in doing so. Professor Grant appeared to be particularly dedicated to teaching remedial English classes and was clearly committed to the education of his students. He showed a willingness to work with students, whatever their reading and writing level, and noted that teaching is a lot about giving students the basic tools needed to excel academically and professionally, especially given the following:

A lot of them are from another country . . . their grammar is not that sharp; and some people, because they haven't taken a class in 20 years or so, their grammar is not that sharp.

Although Professor John also seemed interested in teaching remedial English

students, his approach was different from that of Professor Grant's. In the interview, he told a story about how he became a faculty member at the community college. He noted that although his background is in business, he was recruited due to an immediate need in the English department and the fact that he knew the woman who hired him, to teach the classes. In the hiring process, she told him that she was offering him the position because she believed that he would "be sensitive with the students and patient with them" and further noted that "you need patience when you teach these courses," which she evidently believed was a quality Professor John possessed. This was something Professor John agreed with as well. He perceived that teaching remedial students was tied directly to helping students succeed academically and in facilitating their experience of having success.

Using the information gathered from the interaction I had with each teacher, I shared what they communicated to me about their feelings toward teaching. What they communicated to me was compared to what was said by the students when asked if they thought the teachers were interested in seeing them succeed. To illustrate a point made by Professor Grant, he had this to say about what he felt was most valuable for students to have success in his classes:

What I've found is that the students who come all the time love that stuff [class discussion about the books being read and the concepts being taught]. The students who miss classes, well they're lost. They don't know what you're talking about. Even though I show a PowerPoint after we discuss it and we go over it and I email that to all of my students and that's what I base tests on or whatever you want to call it. I do that because on the PowerPoint it's not just

words. There's also photos on there or whatever it is that I use on there. It's another way of teaching, another way of getting it into their heads. It works pretty well.

In relation to what Professor John felt that students could take away from classes and how he believed his classes could help students meet with future success in life, this is what he shared:

It should be the best course they've ever taken in their whole lives. That's how high the bar's set. It should be where they not just learn about how to write well and how to read and all this other stuff, grammar, blah, blah, blah, blah, but it should be where they really are able to think and evaluate their whole lives. It should happen in six weeks. It should be the best course they've ever taken, where they can look back and say, "Man, that was"—for whatever reason—"That was the best course I've ever taken in my whole life."

Clearly, the two teachers have differing opinions about what constitutes success. While both of them were willing to help students, Professor Grant may have done so more effectively. His approach is that of the academic; he is very committed to seeing his students succeed in their reading and writing skills. He shared that "learning how to read and write well will last these students a lifetime!" Conversely, Professor John seemed more committed to having his students feel they were "having a good time in a nice environment." His approach was not so academic, but rather more focused on the students feeling emotionally comfortable and less "fearful" of the learning process. His lack of structure in the class did not afford the students many opportunities for academic growth.

Presenting what was learned from the students about how they viewed the teachers' commitment toward their educational success, the students found Professor Grant's approach to teaching remedial reading classes to be challenging, yet supportive. For example, Missy felt that Professor Grant "really wanted her to do well." She further shared that she believed Professor Grant wanted her to be "motivated, stay focused and make sure I pay attention. [He is] hoping for me to get something out of it." In Professor John's classes, however, and while the students appeared to be appreciative of his dedication as well, it was in a manner more aligned with the students feeling good about themselves in general, rather than the feeling of success that comes from student achievement specifically. Jalynda explained it in the following way:

I mean I feel like the teacher, the first time he presented himself, I feel like he's really confident about what he does and about what he teaches. I feel like I will learn a lot with him because of the confidence he has in himself and in us.

Yet, by the end of the class, and while Jalynda said she still felt good about Professor John's interest in her success, it was less geared toward learning the material. Near the end of the semester she shared with me, "I still need to learn how to write better." However, at the end of the semester she appeared to be making excuses for his lack of formally educating the students in class as well. These were her final thoughts of Professor John's class, "I think he's so laid back and chill and stuff because he must have had teachers that were very strict and wanted you to write one way. So I think he's talking from experience. He's talking about—I think he knows what he's talking about." In relating what David shared with me about being a student of Professor John's closer to

the beginning of the class, he said, “Yeah, I just think he expects hard work. I think he wants us to be in class, be on time, and just put effort forward. I mean honestly, he doesn't look like a tough teacher. He just looks like he's going to help us out as much as he can.”

Nevertheless, by the end of the class, David spoke differently about his experience with the teacher. In the last interview, this is what he said:

I just had to write the papers the Professor John assigned. It was hard for me to understand that my attendance didn't matter in class. But there was nothing presented to me that I didn't understand. It was easy. Too easy. I didn't learn anything new. He didn't teach a lot you know. He just gave us outlines and things to follow, made comments here and there, but as long as I handed in my assignments, I was good.

David's assessment of Professor John was quite different from what he initially felt about the teacher's commitment to student learning. Although some students seemed to find Professor John's lax attitude toward education “easier” and felt this was a good thing, David's viewpoint most accurately represented what the majority of the students felt about Professor John's approach, that his teaching style was lacking structure. On the whole, it appeared as though the students really wanted to learn how to read and write well, move to the next level, and to achieve their individual academic and career goals.

As a final example of how student learning was not truly supported by Professor John yet was supported by Professor Grant, this was made clear from the final interview with Alex, the 26-year-old Hispanic man from one of Professor Grant's classes. He shared that he felt he and the teacher “were on the same page because he believes that he

can help me learn. I like to read and I like to learn new things. I like to learn about a lot of stuff because I'm hungry for knowledge, so I can learn a lot of things from him, a lot of new things.”

Summary of Theme 2

Both teachers seemed to enjoy teaching the classes, and their associated sections. On the surface, they both seemed to have an interest in their students' academic progression. Professor Grant appeared dedicated to the learning process of his students and felt that “everyone benefits more if students come to class regularly and apply themselves.” Professor John also said he felt strongly about seeing the students come to an understanding and improve their writing. However, he seemed less academically focused and structured. In line with this, the majority of the students who participated in the interview felt that Professor John took a “soft approach” to student learning in that he did not appear overly concerned with correcting their grammatical or structural errors. One potential problem with this is that students may not get what they need academically and will struggle in future classes. Overall, Professor Grant's contribution to the students' success seemed much more in line with the academic rigor needed to achieve success based on being able to complete college and find steady employment.

Theme 3: Teachers' Inconsistent Teaching Practices

For this theme, the teachers expressed differing thoughts relating to their teaching practices. What follows is the assessment of the teachers' feelings about what constitutes an effective learning process, as compared to how the students experienced the teachers' approach to teaching. Regarding the manner in which the two teachers saw their own approach to the learning process, there was a notable difference. Professor Grant

believed that the approach to learning should be through application of what is being taught, and through critical assessment of what is being read. He affirmed this by saying, “I give them assignments and they have to apply those things, like the coordinated conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, apply them while they write. The more they do that, the more they become comfortable with it.”

Then, when asked for an example of what is done in a typical class period, Professor Grant noted the following:

We’ll read; like today we’re going to read a short story—and we look for things that the author does in there, little motifs and his uses of color, how he develops the character, what motivates characters, and so they look for that rather than just reading the story straight and saying; oh, it’s a story about a guy who gets shipwrecked. It’s like; well what does it imply? What’s going on there? Why is there light here and no light there, and that kind of thing.

He further commented that “the students who wanted to learn loved doing that kind of work and that they found it to be very helpful.” On the other hand, Professor John felt that a more relaxed approach to the learning process was helpful to students. He described his style of teaching in this manner:

Well, it's important that . . . I think that a teacher should come in and be organized. Take it one step at a time. Try to get to know the students; it's hard to do, but try to get to know them individually. Because everybody has an individualized heart, soul, mind. They have expectations. They have fears. They need things. We're all human, and we're all—you know, sometimes we get too

desensitized by society that is just overwhelmingly cold. So what I try to do, believe it or not, Jessica, is I try to make my classroom a sanctuary from everything outside. So the students come in and the door remains open, but it's really shut.

Yet, most of the students were not comfortable with this approach as is discussed more fully later in the study. Through Professor Grant's different approach to education, and learning, Alicia shared that he was very responsive to giving her what she needed. Closer to the beginning of the class she felt he emphasized reading, writing, and homework. By the end of the class, Alicia still felt similarly about Professor Grant's intentions for her education and style of teaching. She described Professor Grant as "outgoing, friendly, interactive, and [someone who] explained the work."

Jesse also said that Professor Grant was "hands-on" and was very helpful. In general, the majority of the students felt that Professor Grant was effective in his teaching as evidenced by the essays I read, written in relation to what the students were reading in class. Those written by the end of class were much better than those written at the beginning of Professor Grant's classes.

While Professor Grant seemed to be a direct proponent of the students' understanding and learning the material through feedback, Professor John used a different approach with his students. As an example, Alicia revealed that her comfort level of working with Professor John and the teacher's way of giving students' feedback made her feel that he was very "nice":

He's like, "Oh, you don't have to do that. If you want to write about this, you write it. If you want to say it in this way, you can say it. You don't have to worry

about what sounds right and not." Because either way, it's easier for you to write what you're thinking than to try to make it look nice for everybody, understandable for everybody.

Alicia shared that she was a bit confused by this at first because she initially thought she needed to learn in a more standard manner through regular feedback, but ultimately Alicia seemed comfortable with this approach because it “wasn’t too hard.” However, William felt very differently. He believed that he was not getting what he needed from Professor John as a teacher, as evidenced in the following portion of the interview.

The class I had before this one, the teacher was like a grandmother. And while this was not like that, he was not on top of me. It was easy; I handed in a paper. He made comments sometimes, and I got a grade. Most of the time I just got a grade. Then I started missing classes and it didn’t affect my grade. Now I don’t know what I want—if I want to be babied so that the teacher knows that I’m in class and I count, or if I just want to do whatever I want, hand in a paper and leave, show up to class or not.

Summary of Theme 3

There were some differences between the teaching practices of the two teachers, as noted in their approaches to students. Professor Grant believed that the approach to learning should be focused, interactive, and “hands on,” and that the students should be responsible partners in their own education. The majority of Professor Grant’s students felt Professor Grant gave his students adequate and helpful feedback that encouraged their learning process. However, this was not so apparent in Professor John’s classes.

Although Alicia seemed to let his lax attitude slide, William was irritated that he did not get what he needed in Professor John's class. He was not pleased with getting so little attention, although he prefers not to be smothered by a teacher. Consequently, the structure lacking in Professor John's approach to teaching did not work for William, or for the majority of the students he represents in this study. It seemed Professor John was more focused on having the students feel relaxed and at ease in what can be termed a complacent attitude toward teaching.

Summary of Themes

Through sharing and examining the data gathered from interviewing the 12 students as well as the two teachers, common themes were found regarding the perceptions of students and teachers in this study. Interview data were gathered, sorted, and coded based on the three themes: (a) the varied academic experience of students in remedial community college programs depending on the teacher, (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success, and (c) inconsistent teaching practices. As seen from the interviews and in line with the students' versus teachers' analysis, there appears to be a misalignment between what the students want to achieve in all four of the remedial English classes versus what the teachers want them to achieve. This is not to suggest that students never procrastinate, drop out, or fail to do well in classes for a host of varying reasons. Yet, their chances for success are greater if they have aligned support from teachers who are knowledgeable in their subject matter. In this study, it seems clear that only Professor Grant is fully in step with the wants and needs of the majority of the students in these classes, whereas Professor John does not give structure or promote student achievement of goals.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the examination of the perceptions of both students and teachers in remedial community college English reading and writing classes provided insight into how students seemed to learn best. This analysis modeled Cox's earlier studies relating to the learning attitudes of students enrolled in courses, approaches, and perspectives at community colleges. This chapter began with a descriptive portrayal of the setting, as well as what was observed in the classroom. These observations were drawn from the notes taken during my observations. The chapter examined the three prevalent themes that emerged from the interview data, observation notes, and a review of documents. The primary themes, adapted from Perun's (2014) approach were as follows: (a) the varied academic experience of students in remedial community college programs depending on the teacher, (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success, and (c) inconsistent teaching practices. Although the themes were primarily aligned with the interview data, class observation truly reflected and validated what was gathered in the interviews and was analyzed based on both within-case and cross-case approaches. The identified themes, when integrated with one another and through the observational notes and interview data, provided a descriptive and holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied (See Appendix E). Further analysis of this qualitative case study, through analysis of common themes and the research questions, further helped to draw conclusions in the following and final chapter of this work.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter presents conclusions and recommendations based on the perceptions of both students and teachers toward remedial education. Only a limited number of qualitative studies have addressed the influence of teaching methods and student learning approaches on the effectiveness of remedial programs as a whole. A discussion of the findings is presented in relationship to the methodology, the research questions and associated emergent themes, the conceptual framework, and implications related to policy and practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research as well.

Research Questions Restated

This study focused on answering the following research questions:

- How do students describe their experiences of participating in remedial classes?
- How do teachers describe their experiences of teaching remedial courses?
- What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes?
- What differences, if any, exist in the goals of students and teachers for remedial classes?
- What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the knowledge students are expected to acquire in order to succeed in remedial classes?

Summary of Methodology

Given that this study focused on comparisons and contrasts between student and teacher perspectives and the influence of teachers' teaching approaches on students' academic success, the data analysis generally focused on understanding both students' and teachers' perspectives on teaching and learning. The data analysis process started during the data collection phase when I began reviewing notes from observations. Detailed notes about the actions, behaviors, and communication between students and teachers were analyzed. My field notes were also used in conjunction with the data obtained from the interviews as a means to discover themes concerning the perspectives of the students as well as those of the teachers.

There were two primary types of analyses conducted in this study. The first was within-case analysis, in which I compared the results from a single case, or group (Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014). The other type of analysis employed was cross-case analysis, in which I compared the results between the groups. The most relevant cross-case analysis conducted was a comparison of the perspectives of students with those of teachers. The interview questions were designed for both groups, which allowed for triangulation of the findings. The final analysis of data relied heavily on the coding mechanism developed for this study. The coding procedure for the data closely followed Perun's (2014) 11 categories, and was adapted where necessary, based on participant responses. The transcriptions of the interviews were categorized by type of answer, type of remedial class, class size, and so forth. Responses taken during the interviews and

observed in the classrooms did not perfectly fall into each of Perun's (2014) categories, but the use of many of his categories did apply to this study.

From the analysis of the data, three major themes emerged that captured the experiences of participants: (a) the varied academic experience of students in remedial community college programs depending on the teacher, (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success, and (c) inconsistent teaching practices. These themes assisted in answering the research questions presented in this study. A discussion of how the findings are related to the research questions follows.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1

How do students describe their experiences of participating in remedial classes?

In response to the first research question, varying results were obtained on the students' perceptions of participating in remedial classes at the onset of this study. Generally speaking, most students seemed to feel that taking remedial classes was beneficial and that the teachers in these classes have more time to spend with individuals, given the smaller class size during the summer semester. However, some students did not feel that they had certain reading and writing needs met in some of the remedial classes. This was partly blamed on the teacher's teaching style but also on students who felt they were not smart enough or who did not try hard enough.

Associated Theme

This research question is related to the first theme: (a) the varied academic experience of students in remedial community college programs depending on the teacher. Most students, at any level, described their feelings of participating in remedial

classes as a way to have their education needs met and many found the classes to be adequate for this purpose. However, several students felt Remedial Writing 001, taught by Professor John, was not rigorous enough. For some, the easiness of Professor John's class will most likely be a disservice in the future, even if at the moment it is in line with just wanting to be done with remedial classes. On the other hand, the majority of the students taking Remedial Reading 001, Professor Grant's class, were sufficiently challenged for academic rigor. Overall, students' reactions to taking remedial courses were mixed, but the prevailing theme was that most students found that active participation in a remedial class that provided structure, challenge, and solid learning opportunities helped them grow academically.

Research Question 2

How do teachers describe their experiences of teaching remedial courses?

In an analysis of both teachers, varying viewpoints on teaching remedial courses were apparent. Professor Grant appeared to enjoy teaching remedial English classes. This teacher seemed interested in meeting students' academic needs. He appeared dedicated to the learning process and was especially encouraged when students came to class regularly and applied themselves. Alternately, Professor John felt as many teachers do who do not want to teach remedial classes that these classes grant very little professional prestige. Nevertheless, he appeared to relish the opportunity to teach remedial English. Moreover, although he claimed he felt strongly about seeing the students improve in their writing, he also seemed to enjoy the opportunity to "entertain" the students with stories about himself.

Associated Theme

This research question relates to the second theme: (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success. Both teachers seemed to enjoy teaching the classes and their associated sections, and they both appeared to have an interest in their students progressing academically. Professor Grant seemed more dedicated to the learning process of his students, as his actions such as his attention to detail, his insistence they attend classes, and his willingness to provide feedback reflected this. Professor John also noted that he felt positive when students learned in his classes. However, he seemed academically unfocused and did not ensure that his students were learning the correct writing methods that would serve them in the future. Professor John appeared to come more from a genuine desire for his students to feel safe and valued in class, while Professor Grant appeared to be more focused on teaching technical reading and writing skills.

Research Question 3

What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes?

In response to the third research question, there is quite a bit of diversity in the answers garnered from both the students and the teachers. Student responses to the teachers' approach to learning have been noted, as well as findings related to the teachers' feelings about what constitutes an effective learning process. Student perceptions were assessed based on the feedback they received from teachers. The students found Professor Grant's approach to teaching challenging, yet supportive. In reaction to Professor John's teaching style, at the start of the classes, the students appeared to be appreciative of his approach to teaching. The students viewed his

confidence and relaxed style as a manner in which they felt comfortable learning. Nevertheless, by the end of the semester, many students felt differently about Professor John's approach. Many (88%) felt that he was too relaxed and that although they felt less stressed about the class, the students did not feel as though they were learning as much as they could learn. Students agreed that this teacher was less effective as an English teacher. In contrast, Professor Grant believed that the approach to teaching should be focused and interactive, and he did promote this in class. Professor John felt that a gentle approach to the learning process was most helpful to students. It seemed clear that Professor John did not enforce any standards regarding student work, perhaps being more concerned with their feeling comfortable than with having them learn the material well.

Associated Theme

This research question relates to the third theme: (c) inconsistent teaching practices. As was observed, there was considerable diversity in the teaching practices of the two teachers. Professor Grant believed that the approach to learning should be focused, interactive, and "hands on," and that the students should be partners in their own education, ultimately responsible for the learning they achieved. Conversely, Professor John had an almost careless approach. He focused on having the students feel comfortable rather than learn the material appropriately and thoroughly. From a cross-case perspective, both the students and Professor Grant appeared to feel similarly about a teacher's methodology being one that is helpful to the learning process. However, it seems that the students' perceptions about Professor John's approach are different from how he perceives his own methods. While the students generally felt they could be

learning more in Professor John's classes (93%), the teacher felt he had a valid and helpful method.

In a cross-case analysis, the majority of Professor Grant's students (98%) felt he gave them adequate and helpful feedback that encouraged their learning process. Yet, the lack of structure in Professor John's approach to teaching did not allow the students to feel they could trust the feedback, if any, they received from him.

Research Question 4

What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes?

In answer to Research Question 4, in the goals expressed by the students versus the goals expressed by the teachers, there were some notable differences. Overall, almost all students expressed that they wanted to learn how to read and write well and move on to pursue further higher education and careers. This was the overall sentiment of the vast majority of students. From the perspective of within-case analysis, Professor Grant seemed to be a direct proponent of the students' meeting their ultimate goals; yet it appeared as though Professor John was not able to meet the needs of his students, although he alleged he had a clear goal in mind. Most students felt they needed to learn in a more traditional manner in order to achieve their goals and that this was not being experienced in Professor John's class.

Associated Theme

This research question relates to the second theme: (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success. The overall sentiment of the vast majority of students (98%) was that Professor Grant's interest in the students' success seemed much more in line with the academic rigor needed to achieve the higher

quality of life offered through education. Alternatively, most students (97%) felt that Professor John did not take an interest in their goals, demonstrated by his lack of teaching them the skills they need to be successful in upcoming English classes.

On the surface, they both seemed to have an interest in their students' academic progression. Yet, Professor Grant appeared more dedicated to the learning process of his students and felt that "everyone benefits more if students come to class regularly and apply themselves." Professor John also said he felt strongly about seeing the students come to an understanding and improve their writing. However, he seemed less academically focused and structured. In line with this, the majority of the students who participated in the interviews felt that Professor John took a lax approach to student learning in that he did not appear concerned with correcting their grammatical or structural errors. One potential problem with this is that students may not get what they need academically and consequently will struggle in future classes.

From the cross-case perspective, the students interviewed generally had well-defined goals for the future, and these appeared to be very well supported by Professor Grant. On the other hand, while Professor John verbally shared that he wanted his students to succeed—to have a chance in the future—his teaching methods did not line up with this future possibility. Overall, Professor Grant's contribution to the students' success seemed much more in line with the academic rigor needed to achieve success, based on being able to graduate from college and find steady employment.

Research Question 5

What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the knowledge students are expected to acquire in order to succeed in remedial classes?

In answer to the final research question, there is some diversity in the answers

garnered from the students and the teachers. This question was analyzed using a within-case framework and revealed some similarities and dissimilarities in the perceptions of knowledge students should be expected to acquire to succeed in remedial classes. The teachers had different perceptions of the knowledge students should acquire in order to succeed in remedial classes. Professor Grant emphasized that while he attempted to do his best to teach the students, as exemplified through his general approach to teaching, it was ultimately up to the student and the level of effort they exerted that would determine what they took away from the class. In relation to what Professor John thought students were expected to achieve in his classes, he believed that the students should find his class an opportunity for growth, much beyond the simple skills of learning how to write effectively. Clearly, the teachers in this study had different interpretations of student success and the means by which to aid students in achieving their objectives.

Regarding the students' reactions associated with this research question, the students generally felt that Professor Grant was effective as an English teacher. Most students felt he was very focused on teaching them the skills they needed for the future. The vast majority of the students believed they would come out of the class prepared to go on to the next level; and Professor Grant also supported this, both verbally and in his teaching style. On the contrary, the students in Professor John's classes did not feel so strongly about this teacher's commitment to their future. A number of the students in Professor John's sections seemed uncertain that this teacher was effectively preparing them for subsequent classes. Yet, when asked, Professor John shared that he "was committed" to the students' future. Clearly, there is a discrepancy relating to the students' feeling about Professor John versus his feeling about his own teaching methods.

Associated Theme

This research question relates to the third theme: (c) inconsistent teaching practices. As was observed, there was considerable diversity in the teaching practices of the two teachers. In this portion of the within-case analysis, all students felt they should learn and be able to move on to further education after the conclusion of their classes. In line with this, both teachers shared that they wanted students to meet with success in their classes through their instruction and feedback. Nevertheless, from a cross-case perspective, not all students felt that Professor John shared their own agenda for what they took from the classes. Professor Grant's aspirations did appear to be in line with the students' thinking about how constructive feedback could help them with academic success. Clearly, there were some differences between the teaching practices of the two teachers, as noted in their teaching styles. Professor Grant believed that the approach to learning should be focused, interactive, and with the intent that the students should be responsible partners in their own learning and future. The majority of Professor Grant's students felt Professor Grant gave them helpful feedback that facilitated their learning process. However, this was not so apparent in Professor John's classes. Professor John appeared to be more focused on having the students feel relaxed and at ease, in what can be termed a complacent attitude toward teaching. Although this complacency was noted by the majority of the students, Professor John asserted that he "wanted the best for his students" in the future, which illustrated a misalignment between the perceptions of teacher and students. As noted in the conceptual framework used in this study, the triangle of instruction (Grubb & Gabriner, 2013) demonstrates that having students and teachers aligned in their thinking is an essential component to student success; yet this

alignment was found lacking in this study.

In summary, the research questions in this study sought to answer the following: How do students describe their experiences of participating in remedial classes? How do teachers describe their experiences of teaching remedial courses? What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes? What differences, if any, exist in the goals of students and teachers for remedial classes? What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the knowledge students are expected to acquire in order to succeed in remedial classes teachers and students? It seems apparent that a full understanding of how students and teachers, in the classes within this particular study, approached these remedial education courses was explicated. The teachers exhibited significant differences in their pedagogies, and this was clearly reflected in the differences in student attitudes toward the classes as well as their behaviors in the classes. The three emergent themes, as well as the conclusions drawn to answer the research questions, when synthesized, provided the answers to these questions (Appendix E).

Incorporating the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study, constructivism, explains a descriptive theory of learning that promotes interaction between prior knowledge and new knowledge, used for learning in the classroom. This is especially salient for use between educators and students (Fosnot, 2013). For remedial education, constructivism encourages meaningful and active interactions between teachers and students to determine the strengths and weaknesses of students and to promote practices that lead to the academic success of remedial college students. Adopting this framework enables

remedial education teachers to better guide future lesson plans and emphasizes the importance of giving attention to each student (Twomey, 2006). More specifically, the conceptual framework of this study draws upon Grubb and Gabriner's triangle of instruction (2013) which depicts the relationship between (1) the teacher, (2) the student, and (3) the curriculum, placing the most emphasis on the teacher's responses to the students and curriculum choices.

One of the primary issues in this study, also noted by Cox (2009) in an assessment of the triangle of instruction model, is that there is a disconnect between remedial students' understanding of what constitutes appropriate learning and the teachers' understanding of what is required for learning to take place at the college level. Having knowledge of both of these aspects is critical to facilitating student achievement in college, especially for teachers. In light of this, the conceptual framework used in this study explicitly includes student perceptions, as well as those of the teachers, as analyzed through what the participants shared and through their experiences. Ultimately, it has been revealed that students in remedial classes are more apt to succeed when effective teachers give them structure and encourage them to take personal responsibility for their education (Cox, 2009).

It is clear that students both want and need structure and support. These findings were further reflected in the literature review; students find that active participation in a remedial class that provides structure, challenge, and solid learning opportunities, promotes their academic growth (Bahr, 2008; Boatman & Long, 2010; Cox, 2009; Grubb & Gabriner, 2013; Jenkins, 2011). Yet, when remedial class sizes are often larger and taught by inexperienced or unschooled teachers at the community college level, problems

arise in students having their needs met (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Bettinger & Long, 2007). Research indicates that community colleges rely heavily on the use of adjunct (part-time or contingent) faculty as a cost-saving measure (Bettinger & Long, 2007). These findings are particularly relevant to this study, given that similar results were found from the perceptions of students in Professor John's sections, given his status as an inexperienced teacher of college students who normally does not teach English. The present study also supports conclusions drawn by Bogert (2004), who noted that the increasing use of teachers inexperienced in the subject matter results in lowered teaching quality. These findings were evident in analyzing Bogert's study of 22,000 teachers from three community colleges in Florida. His study found that fewer than 5,000 were regular, full-time faculty members (78%) and a number were not experienced teachers, were not well versed in the subject they were teaching, or a combination of both. There was an obvious connection between the lower success rate of students from Bogert's study (2004) and the findings in this study, which reflect higher levels of student satisfaction and learning in Professor Grant's sections, who, although a part-time community college teacher, is a highly experienced teacher of both high school and college English.

Another problem identified in this study is the role of community colleges as a stepping-stone between secondary and college-level education. Issues of the cost of remedial education at the community college level are countered by the need to provide more highly trained teachers. In this regard, there may be a lack of alignment between community college courses and four-year college programs, commonly found where quality teaching is sacrificed for financial saving, frequently found in community

colleges (Cho & Karp, 2013).

In reviewing the findings in both the literature review and in the data collected in this study, the misaligned expectations of remedial courses between teachers and students is apparent. Teachers using different programs operate on a spectrum ranging from strict adherence to four-year college standards to loosening those standards to provide basic background information. Misalignment is evident in Callahan and Chumney's (2009) investigation of remedial writing programs, in which one teacher focused on teaching analytical reading and synthesis and evaluation techniques, whereas another focused primarily on grammar and punctuation. When teachers have such varying expectations of the students and the program, it is not surprising to find that teachers and students are misaligned in their expectations. Cox (2004, 2009) found that although teachers of remedial programs often expected the students to take responsibility for the learning process, students wanted the teachers to teach them what they needed to know (Cox, 2015). Although certain students seemed to want classes to be easy, most wanted to learn and needed support from their teachers to accomplish that. Evidenced in my study and when interviewing the students in Professor John's classes, students noted a lack of rigor in their classes necessary for their academic success. On the other hand, the majority of students in Professor Grant's classes felt that his teaching method was much more in line with the academic rigor needed to achieve a higher quality of life offered through education. Such inconsistent teaching practices reveal a significant misalignment between what students are experiencing in remedial community college classes and what they could be experiencing consistently.

These findings also hold significant weight when assessing data from the National

Educational Longitudinal Studies where Cho and Karp (2013) found that over a 10-year period only 6% of students passed all of the developmental writing courses, 71% passed all reading courses, and only 30% passed math. Of those students that did pass the remedial courses, fewer than half enrolled in college-level courses. Furthermore, the majority of students who enroll in developmental courses do not persist to degree completion (Bailey et al., 2010; Jenkins, 2011). Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) reported that between 25% and 40% of community college students eventually transfer to a four-year college. Approximately 25% of recent high school graduates who took at least one developmental course in community college earned a degree within eight years (Attewell et al., 2006). A lack of alignment in teaching strategies and curricula, causing attrition in large numbers for remedial community college students, exists. As a means to mitigate student failure to thrive academically, there are growing numbers of statewide initiatives to align curricula guidelines from elementary through college (Chamberlin & Plucker, 2008; Cox, 2004). Although a number of states have such alignments in place today, it is still too early to determine how much of an impact those standards have made on improving remedial education in community colleges (Cho & Karp, 2013).

Recommendations for Practice

As has been discussed previously, the conceptual framework used in this study draws upon constructivism, as it relates to meaningful interactions between teachers and students to promote the successful remediation at community colleges. The individual attention paid to each student is a measure of quality instruction using a constructivist methodology as put forth by the conceptual framework of the Grubb and Gabriner's triangle of instruction (2013). In relationship to the East Coast community college used

in this study, it has been revealed that newer practices are needed in the classroom to improve remedial student success in college. Some of these practices may be as simple being on the alert for struggling students and providing intervention when necessary or allowing them to engage more fully with the material by providing experiential opportunities for learning. Simply having access to students' Accuplacer or Compass test scores could be beneficial in understanding what students need to succeed in college, whether or not those assessments are completely accurate. All of these types of recommendations for practice are especially important for remedial students, who tend to struggle more than most college students. The more information obtained about a student, the greater the capacity to aid them in their post-secondary education.

The role of the teacher is also essential and requires ample teacher support, consistency, and academic involvement to aid in creating an effective remedial college teaching method. Taking students to a poetry reading or a writing workshop could help deepen their relationship to the material being taught. As depicted and explored with Grubb and Gabriner's (2013) triangle of instruction, community college teachers need to provide students with opportunities to engage in more interactive and structured academic learning. While students have the opportunity to further their academic endeavors, the role of teachers is critical in finding new ways in which to meaningfully engage their students. It is important that teachers provide students with the necessary tools to succeed in remedial classes that allow for persistence in future college classes (Cho & Brown, 2013).

Some of these issues can be addressed through improving consistency among the teachers in terms of what is important for students to learn in remedial courses. Remedial

programs have exhibited varying levels of effectiveness, as noted in the literature and through the data collected for this study. Illustrated in the study by Callahan and Chumney (2009), students in one class were expected to construct cohesive and coherent arguments in support of their positions in their class essays and discussions, whereas students in a second class that nominally followed the same course curricula and assessments spent most of their coursework on grammar and vocabulary exercises. As discovered in the interviewees' responses, the need for consistent and academically focused teaching methods should be adopted by all teachers teaching remedial community college courses. Many students in my study were not having their academic needs met, and especially not in Professor John's classes. These findings point to the need for the professional development of community college remedial teachers to more effectively implement a system with more accountability for teachers, clearly preferred by the students who participated in this study.

Specifically, if one of the struggling students in Professor John's classes were to have been part of a learning community where students could take two or more linked classes together as a group, ideally with the teachers of those classes coordinating course outlines and jointly reviewing student progress, students may have benefited tremendously. If this practice had been used in Professor Grant's and Professor John's classes, with the students in both classes functioning as cohorts, students who were struggling may have received additional support. Finally, another way that teachers could effectively support remedial community college students would be to provide them with supplemental instruction. The teacher, an assistant to the teacher, or even a student who has taken the class in the past, could provide this form of support. The use of a

former student to teach supplemental instruction could be a dynamic and effective tool, especially if implemented as a college-wide policy with tangible benefits for both the student and the student teacher.

Recommendations for Policy

Recommendations for policy tie into the recommendations for practice.

Placement testing and accurate college placement are not aligned, and there is no complete consensus on what constitutes college-level work (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Today's students entering college have experienced academic standards that look very different from those that were in use at the time of earlier studies. Before engaging in college, students must first navigate through the landscape of public education, dotted with Common Core, No Child Left Behind, and other elementary and secondary educational efforts currently implemented. Students undoubtedly have different perspectives from those who did not experience these educational programs and policies and are often at the mercy of misaligned placement tests stemming from these newer mandates (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). Policy change in remedial teaching strategies is needed so that remedial students today have a better opportunity to succeed academically. Again, this relates to Bailey's (2009) assertion that while the research appears to offer some general guidance, a lack of conclusive evidence on the effectiveness of particular teaching and remedial strategies exists. He suggests making a broad change to the remedial education programs as a whole, including a comprehensive assessment of student skills (Bailey, 2009).

One way to address some of these issues would be to mandate certain standards be met to attend remedial courses, and not through the use of standardized placement

tests such as Accuplacer and Compass, which have been proven ineffective (Marder, 2016). Using different types of assessments and measurements, such as the GPA, may be more effective for college placement (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). For those students who do not meet the criteria, offer them supplemental assistance of some sort, although tutoring could be placed in this category. This would need to be explored much more fully. As noted above, supplemental instruction, as well as having a system in place to draw attention to students struggling in class, would help remedial students succeed. One policy that could be set in the classroom, and even at the college level in general, could be to have mandatory attendance.

Additionally, a policy providing an effective and mandatory orientation that can help students find their way around campus, explain registration and financial aid, and inform students of support services could encourage remedial community college students to feel more encouraged to participate. Furthermore, the availability of academic goal setting and planning classes or seminars would be useful to students who are uncertain about their goals or for simply reaffirming student goals for students who already have a plan for the future. Along these same lines, a mandatory “student success” course, to be completed during the first semester, could be very beneficial to student achievement, especially if tied to some type of first-year experience program that allows students to create a sense of community. The use of any or all of these policies would be extremely beneficial in supporting remedial community college students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study, set in a college within a major urban area, analyzed the perceptions of both students and teachers on the best approaches to remedial education for the

promotion of student success in college. Given that only a limited number of qualitative studies have addressed the best student learning approaches, future research could be expanded to include the use of more colleges and colleges in multiple states. The use of multiple data points would serve the purpose of analyzing distinct approaches to remedial education that have either failed or succeeded, which could then be used to inform better practices. A comparison of what fosters student success could also be assessed by looking at various types of universities and colleges and their approaches to student learning at the level of remediation. Examining this problem by studying student success rates on potential participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds, minority students, and on students who are pursuing a variety of educational goals, could also be informative.

Although not the primary method supported in this study, an additional manner of assessing effective student learning in remedial programs is that of conducting more quantitative studies as well. Quantifying students' performances more systematically could provide added knowledge to determine what measures could be taken to increase student success. As Bailey (2009) suggested, the need for targeted longitudinal research that tracks students through their community college experience could provide much needed insight, and assessing the success of students in urban versus suburban areas could also be useful. Moreover, the addition of more classes and more teachers to teach those classes would prove beneficial, as having limited numbers of teachers to observe students' remedial experiences limits the ability to draw definite conclusions. Finally, interviewing administrators who are involved in remedial education at community colleges might be helpful in determining what needs to be done to support remedial

community college students. Regardless, all the findings in this study, both from a review of the literature and from the original data collected, suggest the need to reassess the academic success of remedial community college students. Only through further studies can progress be made in ensuring that student needs are effectively met.

Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of both students and teachers on the best approaches to remedial education. Through using qualitative research, this study has offered a better understanding of why students do not remediate successfully. Based on the conceptual framework of Grubb and Gabriner's (2013) triangle of instruction, and modifying this triangle in the context of research by Cox (2000, 2002), this qualitative study sought to develop an understanding of students and teachers' perceptions toward remedial education by taking a multipronged data collection approach. This approach included 14 participants, two of whom were remedial English teachers and the other 12, students, all at an urban community college.

Classroom-based observations of teaching methods and the extensive and repeated interviewing of participants, revealed three dominant themes. These consisted of the following: (a) the varied academic experience of students in remedial community college programs depending on the teacher, (b) teachers' inconsistent level of interest in teaching remedial students and student success, and (c) inconsistent teaching practices. Constructivism helped frame these themes, and this study found that the majority of student participants agreed that, as students in remedial classes, they were more apt to succeed when taught by effective teachers who give them structure and encourage them to take personal responsibility for their education through hard work and commitment.

Finally, this study identified the need for further research related to how and in what areas remedial students are being taught, especially given newer educational mandates, which have served to shift the educational landscape. Furthermore, recommendations were provided for future practice that focused on encouraging meaningful and active interactions between teachers and students in order to determine the needs of the students. This would enable remedial education teachers to better construct future lesson plans and target the weakest areas of individual students, giving students an opportunity to learn more effectively in the classroom. Policy recommendations presented suggest that policy change is needed to shift the approach to education so that remedial students have a better opportunity to succeed academically.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine and assess the perceptions of both students and teachers on the best approaches to remedial education. The goal of this study is to determine how faculty and students describe the effective teaching methods conducive to successful student learning. Given the large number of students who enroll in remedial courses, it is important to examine successful components of effective instruction as well as students' perceptions of how they learn best.

What will be done

Researcher will conduct two face-to-face interviews with both students and teachers. Researcher will partake in class as a student. Researcher will be observing courses.

Benefits of this Study

Your contribution in this interview will contribute to pedagogical research. The findings of this study will be important to future research in the growth of developmental education. Your participation in this study is important to this end.

Risks or discomforts

There are no physical risks for completion of the interview. However, there is some risk of nonphysical discomfort due to the types of the questions being asked in the interview. Such questions pertain to the course, its educational goals, and the performance of the student.

Confidentiality

Your responses will be kept completely confidential. A pseudonym will be used to describe each person interviewed. No information that you provide will be linked to you in any way. Any personal information collected during the course of this interview will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Decision to quit at any time

Your participation is voluntary; you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. To stop the interviews, respondents may simply ask to stop.

How the findings will be used

The confidential and anonymous results of this study will be used to progress research related to the best approaches to remedial education. The findings of this study will guide future studies and will work to improve the education of students. The results from this study will be presented in educational settings and at professional conferences, and the results might be published in an educational journal.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Eunyoung Kim at Eunyoung.Kim@shu.edu or the researcher, Jessica Aviles, at jessicaaviles06@gmail.com.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Appendix B

Interview Questions

The following is the complete list of interview questions to be presented to the students and the teachers:

Student Interview Questions

How did you come to be a student?

What are your goals as a student? After graduation?

How has the semester gone so far?

What grade do you think you might end up with?

Can you describe what you think the teacher expected of you this semester in order to be successful?

What did you have to do to better understand the work presented to you this semester?

What was most challenging? What was the easiest?

Can you describe your approach to class work? Homework? Reading? Writing?

How much of the reading would you say you did? What strategies did you use in class discussions/papers when you didn't do the readings?

Was there any point during the semester in which you felt discouraged? Motivated?

What difficulties or struggles have you had in this class and/or this semester?

Were any of the assignments confusing? If so, why? Have you received help (office hours/tutor/family/friends) for this class?

What successes have you had?

Are you taking any other classes? How does this class compare to your other classes?

How does this class compare to high school?

What do you think about the teachers teaching style?

Could you describe the relationship you developed with the teacher?

What do you think are the three most important things you learned this semester?

Do you think you're a better reader? Writer?

Are you working? What do you do? How many hours? What other commitments outside of school do you have?

What was your high school experience like? What kind of student would you describe yourself as in high school?

What English classes have you taken before this one?

How did you get placed in this English class/level? Did you think you needed it?

Is there anything else I should know about your experience in this class?

Can I follow up with you after the semester to ask what grade you received? If I have additional questions? Perhaps via text or email?

Teacher Interview Questions

How did you become a developmental education teacher?

How do you think the semester is progressing?

How is this group of students similar or different than groups of students you've had in the past?

What challenges are you having with the class?

What successes are you having with the class?

What do you think the students in this class struggle with most? Why do you think that is?

Have you changed your pedagogical approach in anyway (now or over time) to address this struggle?

Do you think this struggle is indicative of developmental students?

What do you think students in this class have the easiest time with?

Why do you think this is?

Do you think this is indicative of developmental students in general?

Have you modified any instruction or content this semester? How so? Why? To what effect?

Could you describe how you decided upon the content of your curriculum this semester?

What is the aim of your curriculum content selection?

How do you assess if your aims are being reached? Are they for this class? If so, how?

If, not, how? Why?

How do you think the semester went?

What was your biggest teaching success this semester?

What was your biggest teaching challenge?

Can you describe your approach to teaching this class this semester? Why do you use this approach?

How effective would you say your approach to teaching was?

Can you describe the relationship you develop with your students?

What expectations would you say that you had for your students' learning this semester?

Did the students meet those expectations?

Can you describe what you think students need to do in order to be successful in your class?

Do you think your students met their full potential? Why? Why not?

If not, what do you think keeps them from meeting their full potential?

Appendix C
Letter of Permission A



Educational Leadership

Ed.D. in

1600 Holloway Ave. BH 521
San Francisco, CA 94132
Phone: 415.405.4103
Fax: 415.338.7019
Email: edd@sfsu.edu

March 16, 2016

Dear Ms Accurso,

You have my permission to use the Triangle of Instruction graphic as published in our book, *Basic Skills Education in Community Colleges*, for your dissertation study. This graphic is not copyrighted and we welcome your use of it.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tahit Ah", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Appendix D

Letter of Permission B

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Type of Use	Thesis/Dissertation
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Format	Print, Electronic
Portion	chart/graph/table/figure
Number of charts/graphs/tables/figures	1
Title or numeric reference of the portion(s)	The Triangle of Instruction, Figure 1
Title of the article or chapter the portion is from	n/a
Editor of portion(s)	N/a
Author of portion(s)	Dr. Robert Gabriner & Dr. Norton Grubb
Volume of serial or monograph.	N/a
Page range of the portion	20-60
Publication date of portion	2013
Rights for	Main product
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In the following language(s)	Original language of publication
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The lifetime unit quantity of new product	Up to 499
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Specified additional information	I have received permission from author, Dr. Robert Gabriner to use the figure 1, "Triangle of Instruction" in my dissertation. I attend, Seton Hall University, South Orange NJ.
The requesting person/organization is:	Jessica Accurso-Salguero
Order reference number	None
Author/Editor	Jessica Accurso-Salguero
The standard identifier	brasil06
Title	Differences in Remedial Pedagogy Approaches Between Teachers and Students
Publisher	Seton Hall University
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Appendix E

Themes and Associated Themes Chart

Research Question	Theme	Associated Theme	Associated Theme
How do students describe their experiences of participating in remedial classes?	Academic experience of students in remedial community college programs.	Most students found active participation provided structure, challenge, and solid learning opportunities.	Struggle experienced as a result of professor's teaching style as well as some student belief they were not smart enough or did not try hard enough.
How do teachers describe their experiences of teaching remedial courses?	Level of teachers' interest in teaching remedial students and contributing to student success.	Professor Grant was more dedicated to the learning process of his students—focused on teaching technical reading and writing skills.	Professor John was academically unfocused and did not ensure that his students were learning the correct writing methods.
What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes?	Teaching practices of the teachers are revealed as reflected in their feedback.	Professor Grant believed in a focused approach—learning that is interactive, and “hands on.” Students should be responsible for their own education.	Professor John focused on having students feel comfortable, rather than learn the material. Lack of structure was an issue.
What differences, if any, exist in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the most effective learning process in remedial classes?	Level of professors' interest in teaching remedial students and contributing to student success, with emphasis placed on the latter.	98% of students agreed—Professor Grant's interest in the students' success was in line with his level of academic rigor.	97% agreed—Professor John did not have a focused interest in their goals as they were not taught the necessary skills for success in upcoming English classes.
What differences, if any, exist in the expected knowledge of students to acquire to succeed in remedial classes between teachers and students?	Teaching practices of the professors as reflected in their feedback.	Students and teachers both felt students should learn and successfully move on to further education by the end of their classes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professor Grant's approach was consistent with the students' educational goals as seen in teacher feedback. Professor John agreed with students about their goals, but was not consistent in his behavior.