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**HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS  
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POST-TRADITIONAL  
REMEDIAL LEARNERS AND THEIR DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT  
SUCCESS**

Pamela V. Eatman-Skinner

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HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS  
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POST-TRADITIONAL REMEDIAL  
LEARNERS AND THEIR DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Pamela V. Eatman – Skinner

Date Submitted: November 10, 2022

Date Approved: January 23, 2022

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Dr. Katherine C. Aquino Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

### HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POST-TRADITIONAL REMEDIAL LEARNERS AND THEIR DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Pamela V. Eatman – Skinner

The Post-Traditional Remedial Learner in higher education is a student constituency that has historically been *Hidden in Plain Sight* and strikingly absent from substantive discussions that foreground their lived experiences, relevance, and success in post-secondary education. Though physically present on campus and numerically significant within the academy, they are not recognized as an influential and consequential student demographic. The juxtaposition of their presence, specifically within the community college setting, and absence in the literature calls our attention to one of higher education's most perplexing omissions.

This study's purpose is to explore the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners (PTRLs) in a specific developmental education program within a community college setting and discover which factors promote and impact their success. Also critical to this study is exploring the situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers PTRLs face as they attempt to complete developmental education milestones.

This study employs a triangulated approach to qualitative investigation, centering the voices and lived experiences of 12 Post-Traditional Remedial Learners between the ages of 25 and 75, nine community college academic personnel, and document analysis

through the review of documentary evidence that serves to supplement and corroborate the interview and focus group data. This multi-perspective approach was utilized to gain a deeper understanding and to be provided with thick descriptions that would help to explicate the phenomenon further and increase the credibility and validity of the findings.

Ultimately, the study serves as both a resource and infrastructure upon which further work may be developed with opportunities to provoke a profound interest in this student populous and heightened levels of understanding, integration, and support for their collegial success.

*Keywords:* Post-Traditional Remedial Learner, Developmental Education, Sense of Belonging, Community College, dispositional, situational & institutional barriers

,

## **DEDICATION**

My heart is overwhelmed and humbled as I reflect upon all of those who have supported me while pursuing my Doctorate in Education Degree. While standing at the precipice of this experience, I didn't quite understand the full height or depth of 'This Moment' and how it would change, strengthen, and challenge me. Amid a global pandemic and after twenty-five years of life in educational service, I returned to the academy to pursue its highest honor, knowing that I possessed the commitment, dedication, and love of education but had not yet conquered the proverbial final frontier.... The coveted Doctorate Degree. I returned to academia because of a timely opportunity but found so much more, a life-altering experience that has left me forever changed.

I am grateful to my fellow cohort members and very special 'sister friends' Linda and Oriel, who formed a circle of support around me throughout this experience. Your friendship, allyship, and companionship will long live in my heart as one of the more significant components of this experience. I also pause to remember the countless numbers of nameless and faceless persons upon whose shoulders I stand, who were not afforded the opportunity nor privilege to enter the hallowed halls of the academy, to hear a lecture, read a book or merely hold a pen. I remember them today. I remember... and stand in awe of their fortitude, resiliency, bravery, and grace. This dissertation and degree also belong to them. I hope they are proud of me.

No dedication would be complete without acknowledging my first teachers, my dearest parents, Bishop Dr. Charles D. Eatman Sr. and Lady Lorraine Eatman. You endowed me with so many rich gifts and instilled a thirst for knowledge, a love of

excellence, and an abiding desire to serve humankind. This brief dedication cannot relay the depth of love within my heart and my thanks to you for your infinite love, sterling example, and enduring friendship. I love you and thank you for all you have done. And to my entire Eatman family and beloved friends, thank you for your unceasing support. Special thanks to my brothers, Charles D. Jr. for your companionship and listening ear, Dr. Timothy K. for your nurturing and unceasing support, and Michael L. for your love and encouragement throughout this process. I also thank my faith community, The Mt. Pleasant Church Family and Academy, who prayed with and for me through each step of this journey. Your continual support and love have sustained me.

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We were admonished on the first day of classes that somewhere along the way, 'The *Change*' would happen.... that as we journeyed through this experience, we would '*Become Doctors*'. I stand today having experienced this transformation, and I am sincerely grateful for it all.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Post-Traditional Learners (PTLs) have become a prevalent student demographic in America's higher educational institutions since the late 1970s (Soares, 2013). Although present within the academy since its inception, for a plethora of political, sociological, and cultural reasons, they remain invisible – *Hidden In Plain Sight* – and curiously absent from many dialogues concerning higher education's mission, vision, purpose, and future (Stokes, 2006). Otherwise known as *Non-Traditional Students, Adult Learners, and Working Learners*, Post-Traditional Learners do not inhabit a place of primacy within the academy, falling outside the university's ideal; the 18-to-24-year-old scholar who lives on campus attends classes full-time and is financially dependent on their parents (Pelletier, 2010).

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that the enrollment of students aged 25 and over in degree-granting postsecondary institutions is not only increasing but growing faster when compared to the traditional 18-to-24-year-old, first-year college student (NCES, 2016). As of 2020, about 37 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions were adults over 25 (NCES, 2022). This widespread and steady growth of PTLs requires college and university leaders to ask themselves, 'Who is the Post-Traditional Learner, and how might their lived experiences serve as fodder for institutional change?'

Historically considered to be high-risk students, Post-Traditional Learners are often aggregated into categories such as "underprepared," "remedial," or "developmental," but as the diversity of students seeking post-secondary education has increased, so has the diversity of the population needing remedial assistance

(Oudenhoven, 2002). The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) cites that about 25% of community college students are ‘prepared’ for college-level studies. The remaining 75% need remediation support in English, Mathematics, or both. This basic skills conundrum begins for many students in primary school and continues throughout their academic careers. Cross (1981) affirms that many public secondary school graduates have literacy and numeracy skills on par with elementary school children. These educational challenges often re-emerge in post-secondary education, creating an iterative cycle of miseducation, remediation, and stop-outs.

The literature suggests that the degree to which a student is “Non-Traditional” plays a vital role in assessing their need for remediation and the likelihood of credential completion. Students with more co-occurring ‘non-traditional’ or adult attributes are often considered at higher risk. Choy (2002) purports that students were considered “minimally nontraditional” if they had only one non-traditional characteristic, “moderately nontraditional” if they had two or three, and “highly nontraditional” if they had four or more non-traditional characteristics.

As we further contextualize the Post-Traditional Learner experience in higher education, we find that adult learners often have at least four co-occurring non-traditional characteristics that may impact their ability to participate successfully in higher educational opportunities. Examples of co-occurring characteristics may include but are not limited to financial independence, delayed enrollment by a year or more after high school, full-time employment, part-time college enrollment, and caring for dependents. Within this context, there is an infinite array of adult attributes that, when experienced simultaneously, may become barriers to enrollment, retention, and persistence.

The literature suggests that as the level of non-traditionality heightens, the likelihood of obtaining a degree diminishes. Choy (2002) reports that 42% of minimally nontraditional, 17% of moderately nontraditional, and 11% of highly nontraditional students reached their goal of attaining their college degree compared to 54% of traditional students. This disparity based on non-traditional attributes is essential as many *Community College* adult students have at least four non-traditional characteristics. They fall into Horn’s ‘highly non-traditional’ category, placing them at significant risk of not completing their degree (Lane, 2004). Table 1, below, provides a scale of the seven most common markers of Post-Traditionality and ranks them accordingly.

**Table 1**

*Criteria Used to Identify Non-Traditional Undergraduates*

<b>Non-Traditional Characteristics</b>		<b>Variable Definitions</b>	
<b><u>Enrollment Criteria</u></b>			
(1)	Delayed Enrollment	Older than the typical age of first-year college students   24 years of age or older	Delayed postsecondary entry by one year or longer from high school graduation or did not receive a standard H.S. diploma
(2)	Part-Time Enrollment	Enrolled Part-Time   Registered for up to 11 equated credits per semester	Enrolled part time in fall of first year of enrollment (1989)
<b><u>Financial and Family Status</u></b>			
(3)	Financial Independence	Not dependent on parent/s for financial provision	Defined according to federal income tax criteria (not claimed as a dependent on parents’ 1988 federal income tax forms)
(4)	Full-Time Employment while enrolled	35 hours or more of work	Worked 35 or more hours per week during any month of enrollment in the 1989 – 90 academic year
(5)	Dependents	Having spouse or children for which you bear financial responsibility	Student reported child(ren) living in the household
(6)	Single Parent	Not married or separated & having no spouse/dependents	Not married or separated and has child(ren) living in the household

**High School Graduation Status**

(7) Did not receive traditional high school diploma	GED or High School Equivalent Diploma or Certificate of Completion	GED or High School Equivalent Diploma or Certificate of Completion
-----------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------

**Scale of Nontraditional Status**

The sum of nontraditional characteristics (0-7)

Minimally nontraditional	1 nontraditional characteristic
Moderately nontraditional	2 or 3 nontraditional characteristics
Highly nontraditional	4 or more nontraditional characteristics

---

\*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: 1986-87 (NPSAS:87), 1989-90 (NPSAS:90), 1992-93 (NPSAS:93), Data Analysis Systems.

While almost half of today’s college student body are adult learners, many facets of higher education are not designed with them in mind, failing to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs (Altbach et al., 2005; Tannehill, 2009). Attewell et al. (2007) posit that higher education has historically rebuffed adult learners and clung to an increasingly unrepresentative image of undergraduate life, documenting through statistical measures that universities filled with working-class and minority students do not live up to that privileged benchmark. This imbalance in student service and support, as experienced by Post-Traditional Learners, perpetuates feelings of difference and nonacceptance in higher education and may impact a student's sense of belonging and desire to remain in college (Kasworm, 2010; Reay, 2002).

Kasworm (2005) asserts that the culprit of higher education’s inept response to its adult learner lies in colleges and universities youth-centric environments, which have, in many cases, been socially and educationally non-responsive to adult learners. The PTLs ‘bipolarity,’ in terms of age, and length of time away from education, further complicate this already tentative relationship, impacting their ability to satisfy their remedial needs and build momentum toward graduation (Ignash, 1997). Cultivating a sense and space for belonging within academic settings is essential as the ‘*conceptual and physical acceptance*’ of the ‘Post-Traditional Learner’ into the collegial environment often belies

a *'pragmatic and programmatic rejection'* of them. These realities undoubtedly impact student satisfaction, enrollment, retention, and persistence.

Some practitioner-scholars argue that Post-Traditional students are marginalized and treated as 'the other,' existing as an invisible constituency on campus (Bash, 2003; Sissel, 2001; Watkins & Tisdell, 2006). This is evidenced by many institutional systems that do not appropriately serve students, from underdeveloped curriculum and unavailable campus resources to obsolete strategic planning measures and misaligned institutional policies. These institutional practices, coupled with situational and dispositional barriers, impact the feasibility of many Post-Traditional students' ability to pursue, persist or excel in higher education. Further, part-time or full-time work demands, family commitments, dependent responsibilities, daily commutes, or other life obligations can converge, serving as formidable barriers to student success (Sutton, 2016).

Despite these realities, the growing presence of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and the unwavering trend towards increased numbers of this diverse student demographic demand that colleges and universities begin to engage students with a higher level of receptivity, preparedness, and responsivity. Hagedorn (2005) posits that post-secondary institutions view non-traditional learners as the 'proverbial square peg' that meets resistance when forced to go through a round hole" designed for the traditional student. In this regard, there must be a conceptual and veritable 'pulling together' of ideology and practice concerning higher education policy and praxis to effectuate change.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners (PTRLs) in a specific developmental education program within a community

college setting and discover which factors promote and impact their success within the post-secondary environment. Through this descriptive, single case study analysis, the researcher will explore how a specific community college setting supports Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework and how the role of academic personnel is integral to their success. A multi-voiced approach will provide a unique lens where the perspective of PTRLs, executive team members, faculty, administrators, and advisors may be captured. Embracing, acknowledging, and being attentive to each stakeholder within the Community College setting will garner a richer understanding of the phenomenon and lead to solutions representing each sector of the campus community. Onana et al. (2019) affirm that college leadership, with particularity, is integral to the Post-Traditional student's experience as they are fitly positioned to advocate for the kinds of services and assistance that students require as they overcome the barriers that threaten their success.

The lived experiences of Post-Traditional Learners, including those who engage in remedial education within the community college setting, should be prioritized as a crucial constituency within higher education. With estimates of adult learners projected to grow faster than the traditional late adolescent student for the foreseeable future (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009), colleges and universities have reason to recognize and cater to this aspect of student diversity. The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) affirms that the enrollment in college for "non-traditional"-aged students is projected to grow more than twice as fast as the "traditional"-aged student enrollment, 21.7 percent, and 8.7 percent, respectively.

Despite the rapid growth of this student demographic, Horn and Carroll (1996) posit that research on the overall experience of the Post-Traditional student at the university level is “almost nonexistent” (p. 15), and Kasworm (2010) and Schuetze (2014) suggest that there is a dire need for further study on the experiences of Post-Traditional students. The literature offers that most empirical efforts have been directed at the experiences of traditional students and focalize how best to address their pressing needs. Although “traditional” 18–22-year-old full-time undergraduate students residing on campus account for only 16% of higher education enrollments, the attention given to this group of students obscures the fact that most college and university students are “non-traditional” – primarily working adults struggling to balance jobs, families, and education (Stokes, 2006). Soares (2013) suggests that leaders within academia must realize that higher education policy and praxes must evolve to ensure the support and success of all student groups.

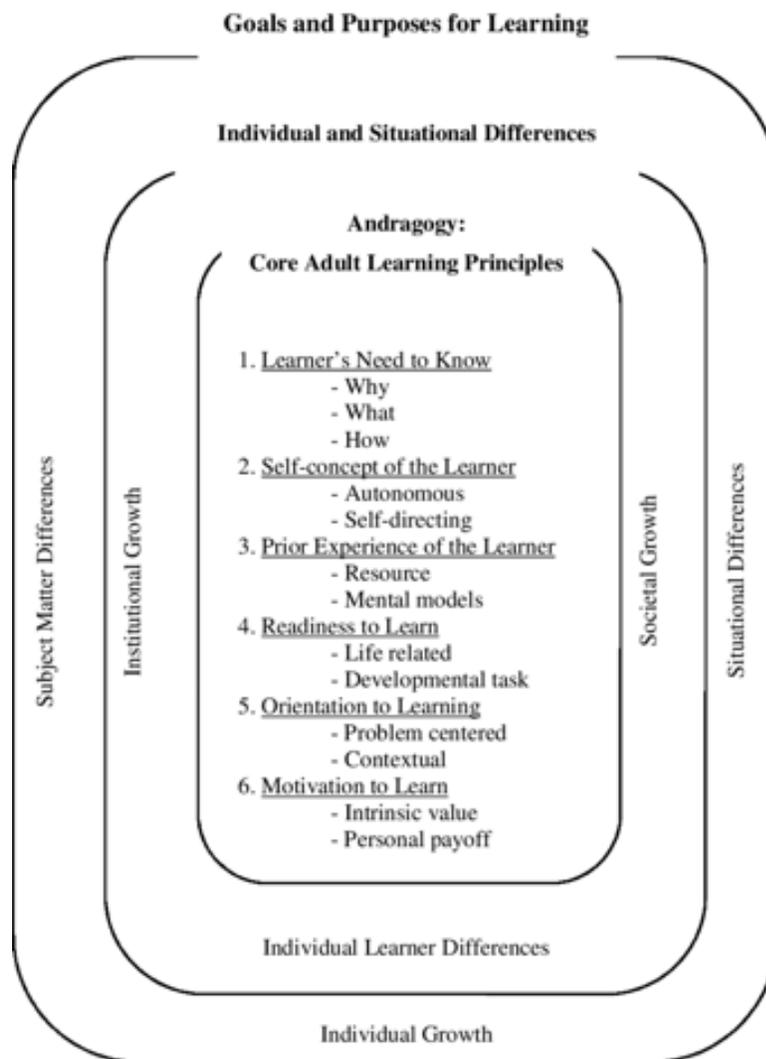
### **Theoretical Framework**

The intersection of Malcolm Knowles’s Adult Learning Theory and Constructivism Theory will provide an invaluable lens by which the Post-Traditional Remedial Learners’ experience may be critically examined. Knowles Adult Learning Theory is the theoretical fulcrum upon which this study is supported. It focuses on how adults learn differently from children and how the learning experience must meet their adult-centered needs. Knowles (1980) begins his analysis of ‘adults as learners’ by assuming that adults are self-directing and self-reliant. He also posits that adults want education to complement and consider the complexity of the rest of their adult lives. He champions a more “adult-like” pedagogical educational system (Knowles, 1980). The

core principles of Knowles', Andragogy are shown in Figure 2. The details exhibit the theory's core components and guiding principles; they are logically presented as it is used in educational praxes.

Figure 1

*Core Principles of Andragogy*



*Adapted from Andragogy in Practice: Clarifying the Andragogical Model of Adult Learning. Performance Improvement Quarterly, 14, 118-143. Holton, E.F., Swanson, R.A., & Naquin, S.S. (2008).*

## **Significance of the Study**

The primary concern that this research seeks to highlight is how Post-Traditional Remedial Learners' may be perceived, better understood, and supported as critical constituents in community college settings. The proposed research study is significant as we witness the rising enrollment trends of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners within community colleges and the simultaneous reduction of educational opportunities for them. The number of Post-Traditional Students enrolling in higher education has grown significantly over the past three decades (Gast, 2013), with a projection of more than 20% through 2022 (Bailey & Hussar, 2014). Examining how Post-Traditional Remedial Learners are supported and engaged within a specific community college environment will provide the information and impetus needed to integrate them more effectively into the campus community and move away from uninformed models that tend to diminish institutional responsibility and problematize the students.

Researching Post-Traditional Remedial Learners is particularly important as we consider the importance of the following: a) extending the research on PTRLs and bolstering the understanding of their lived experiences, barriers, and needs, b). making data-driven decisions that respond to the rising trend of this student group and launching innovative programming that will meet student needs, c). examining how PTRLs are supported and integrated into the campus community, and d) helping community college leaders guide PTRLs toward academic proficiency, matriculation, and graduation.

Large-scale research and multivariate analyses are scarce within this context because adult learners who do not belong to the 'traditional age' group of students are often excluded from study samples (Kuh & Hu, 2001). An American Council on

Education (ACE) survey found that more than 40 percent of institutional respondents indicated that they "did not identify older adult students for purposes of outreach, programs, and services, or financial aid" (Lakin et al., 2008). Further, colleges' exclusionary practices signal a second-tier status of Post Traditional students within higher education settings. Exploring the unique stories of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and the institutional practices that impact their growth will help community college leaders engage and empower PTRLs toward collegial success.

### **Connection with Social Justice & The Vincentian Mission**

The principles that undergird this research are deeply connected to *Social Justice and the Vincentian Mission* and provide a significant opportunity to address the five primary social justice principles: access, equity, diversity, participation, and human rights. Each of these principles is intimately aligned with the plight of the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner and draws our attention to the institutional practices and policies impacting their ability to transition into and through college successfully. The very concept of social justice education embodies a merging of ideas, content, and processes intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action (Bell, 1997; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Freire, 2000; Weissglass, 2002). The Post-Traditional remedial learner inhabits this range of social identities and is included in this commission.

*Hidden in Plain Sight*, the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner is often the recipient of higher education's most tepid induction, finding themselves the perfect candidates for social, faith-based, and human rights considerations. This student group,

widely known as one of the principal beneficiaries of the community college's open-access mandate, has received the benefits of non-selectivity in their admissions standards; however, the more significant matters of access to educational resources, innovative learning and teaching models and the adaptation to modern educational innovations have gone unsatisfied. The democratization of the community college mission was enacted to draw attention to and cure some of the hurts of marginalized, racialized, and disenfranchised persons. This effort recurrently has been thwarted by time-honored institutional systems designed to flourish those of its choosing and to diminish others vicariously. Simply stated, those in the most profound need often go without, while the preponderance of institutional planning efforts, attention, and essential resources are bestowed upon those who have already been seen, heard, and satisfied.

### **Research Questions**

The dissertation study purposed to explore the following research questions:

- RQ1:** What are the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?
- RQ2:** What motivates administrators, instructors, and advisors to work with and support Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?
- RQ3:** What are the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?

### **Definition of Terms**

- Andragogy - defined as the science of adult education; the theory of andragogy was developed to create educational philosophies that concentrate on the needs of

adult students and include their life and career experiences in the learning environment (McCall et al., 2018).

- Community Colleges - public institutions that have historically served as open-access institutions for Post-Traditional Learners, minoritized communities, and marginalized groups.
- Developmental Courses - courses that help students build foundational knowledge in one or more subject areas and provide supplemental support as they complete their degree or certificate programs (Boylan & Bonham, 2007).
- Developmental Education - an array of comprehensive services to address the needs of academically underprepared students (Bettinger & Long, 2007; Oudenhoven, 2002).
- Open Access Institutions - are defined as non-selective colleges and public institutions that provide admittance to all students who have earned a high school diploma. Open admissions colleges' do not use standardized tests or other measures of past academic performance as barriers to acceptance (Shannon & Smith, 2006).
- Post-Traditional Students - are defined as having seven primary characteristics: delayed enrollment in college by a year or more after high school, part-time course enrollment, financially responsible for themselves or their families, having dependents other than a spouse, being a Single parent, working full time while enrolled, or have not received a high school diploma (Horn, 1996).

- Remediation – is defined as special courses for students who lack some reading, writing, and mathematical competencies critical for college-level work (Roueche & Roueche, 1999).
- Sense of Belonging – is defined as a need to establish mutually beneficial and positive interpersonal bonds within their academic community: the necessity to feel valued, accepted, and respected by community members over time and space (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992).
- Traditional Students - 18-to-24-year-old college students who live on campus, attend classes full-time, and are financially dependent on their parents (Pelletier, 2010).

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Synopsis

It is a recurring assertion among North American university teachers that most of today's students come under-prepared and ill-equipped to negotiate the academic rigor of university life (Côté & Allahar, 2007; Gabriel, 2008; Kuh et al., 2006; Weimer, 2002). However, Post-Traditional Remedial students, with particularity, face unique circumstances that put them at greater risk for educational disenfranchisement, stop-outs, and staggering low completion rates. As Cross (1981) initially envisioned, the Post-Traditional Learner was an adult student who returned to school while maintaining family and employment-related responsibilities. This idea has been completely revolutionized as the modern Post-Traditional Learner is recognized as having a range of interrelated characteristics that impact their ability to attend college, become academically proficient, and persist towards degree acquisition. One significant hurdle the Post-Traditional Learner faces in community college is completing developmental coursework requirements. Bailey (2009) affirms that developmental education has been cited as one of the most challenging issues facing U.S. community colleges. The Post-Traditional Remedial Learner experience is intensified as the challenges of fundamental skill deficiencies are collocated with co-occurring situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers that threaten their academic success.

### The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens wherewith the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner will be framed in this study is derived from Knowles's Adult Learning Theory of Andragogy. The applicability of Knowles's Theory is due to its centralization of *Andragogy*, 'the

adult learning experience' versus *Pedagogy*, a theory that captures and explicates the specific educational needs of children. Kidd (1973) affirms that "adults have more experiences, adults have different kinds of experiences, and adult experiences are organized differently"; It is these experiences that set adults "off from the world of children" (p. 46). Using an andragogical theoretical framework will support the heterogeneous population of PTRLs who enter community colleges possessing a wide range of needs, 'adult' experiences, and backgrounds. In contrast, viewing the adult educational experience through a pedagogical lens would result in an ill-fitted, less than well-received student experience and give way to the proverbial '*missing the mark*' regarding their cognitive, psychological, and social-societal needs.

The Constructivist Theoretical Framework may be uniquely paired with the six primary principles of Andragogy which include: first; the adult learners need to know; second, the importance of prioritizing self-directed, self-motivated, and self-controlled learning experiences; third, the recognition of prior experiences as a critical component of learning, fourth, the 'readiness' of the adult learner to thrive within the academic setting, fifth, the level of 'motivation' of the adult learner, and sixth, the adult learners' orientation to acquiring knowledge within a real-life, problem-solving context (Kowalsky et al., 1996). Huang (2002) affirms that because of the plethora of responsibilities and pressures inherent to their adult experience as workers, parents, caretakers, and functioning adults within society, Post-Traditional Learners require a more intentional approach to student support from the institutional partners that serve them. Their educational experience, curriculum, and engagement status must be creatively and

strategically designed to encourage and increase the probability of student persistence and credential attainment.

The tenets of constructivism are intrinsically andragogical in nature as they emphasize meta-cognition, intra-personal engagement, and the co-creation process (Kowalsky et al., 1996). Further, Knowles draws similarities between Constructivism and Andragogy because of learners' ownership of the learning process, experiential learning, and a problem-solving approach to learning (Knowles et al., 1996). Driscoll (2005) affirms that constructivists envisage knowledge as being ‘continually constructed’ by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences and environment; they are not empty vessels waiting to be filled but relatively active organisms seeking meaning” (p. 387). Constructivist theory underscores that learning should be authentic and reflect practicality and applicability to the Post-Traditional students’ everyday experiences. Donaldson and Townsend (2007) propose that “Constructivists emphasize the design of learning environments rather than the implementation of instructional sequences”; adult learners want to learn skills related to their real-life or work experiences (pg. 34).

### **Profile of Post-Traditional Students**

The characterization of the Post-Traditional Student within higher education has evolved to include seven widely accepted attributes: delayed enrollment in college by a year or more after high school, part-time course enrollment, financial responsibility for themselves or their families, having dependents other than a spouse, being a single parent, working full time while enrolled, or having not received a high school diploma (Choy, 2002; Horn & Carroll, 1996; Radford et al., 2015). This definition, though broad, is not all-encompassing, as many institutions now include non-degree, re-admit,

commuter, military, senior citizen, and online/distance learners within the Post-Traditional classification; others have transfer students, first-generation, international, and undocumented students as well (Venaas, 2018). Given these attributes, the idea of a "non-traditional student" has become somewhat of a misnomer. Today's college student population primarily comprises a wide array of adult learners with jobs, families, and responsibilities outside school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

### **Post-Secondary Remediation Defined**

Remedial education, also known as developmental education, describes precollege-level courses and support services to help academically underprepared students succeed in college-level classes (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). The literature confirms that remedial classes address first-year post-secondary students' low-level English, Reading, and Math skills (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012). Remedial English courses focus on advancing students' literacy (Reading and Writing) skills. In contrast, Remedial Math courses are generally designed to prepare students for first-level college math courses (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Because developmental education courses cover precollege or basic education materials, students typically do not earn credits that count toward degree acquisition. This fact is exacerbated for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners, who, despite their spectacular growth in student enrollments, are less likely to finish a degree program when compared to traditional college students (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005).

## **Post-Traditionality vs. Non-Traditionality: The Nomenclature**

In recent years, the higher education community has focused considerable attention and resources on supporting non-traditional students. However, the terminology and thinking surrounding this diverse group must be reimagined to keep up with their evolving needs (Venaas, 2018). Venaas (2018) purports that the lack of a consistent definition matters for many reasons, but one reason is preeminent; if the Post-Traditional student population cannot be defined consistently, how will educators identify, support, and measure their collegial success? Instead of merely 'identifying' the student demographic, the term '*non-traditional*' may indicate the presence and perception of non-priority status students.

The literature suggests that the continued labeling of students as non-traditional may be harmful because it is a form of "othering" that can convey a tri-fold message that we are going out on a limb by letting you attend college, that this place is not designed for you, and that you really should not be here (Kasworm, 2010). These sentiments help to exacerbate the feelings of difference and non-acceptance of Post-Traditional students in higher education (Kasworm, 2010; Reay, 2002) and may impact their sense of belonging. In many cases, institutions have taken few mitigating measures regarding the social integration of non-traditional students into the campus culture. Thus, many PTLs feel they are not a part of the greater campus community (Hittepole, 2019). This experience can lead to feelings of social isolation and may significantly impact students' persistence, sense of belonging, and overall success. Wyatt (2011) affirms that students are more likely to be satisfied and successful if they actively engage within their campus community and feel valued at the college.

The *'reframing'* of the term 'non-traditional student' is a bold move toward a more equitable and 'socially just' approach to student engagement. Iloh (2018) suggests that the continued use of the term "non-traditional" will further alienate an already alienated population and will not bring the educational community closer to the goal of better understanding and supporting their needs. Thus, for categorical reasons as well as to challenge this problematic terminology, the term 'Post-Traditional Student' has now been widely mainstreamed in academic circles; students typically referred to as "non-traditional" are now referred to as "Post-Traditional" (Soares, 2013).

### **Post-Traditionality and Remediation: Scope, Purpose, and Viability**

Post-secondary remediation has been debated among policymakers, educators, and political persons for several decades, maintaining deep ideological divisions regarding remediation's appropriateness, efficacy, viability, and sustainability in higher education (Davis & Palmer, 2010). Common impasses are the efficacy of 'open access institutions, the benefit of remedial support, and determining who should pay for it all. Critics of remediation often support older students who need additional preparatory work, accepting the impact of time away from formal education as a legitimate reason for requiring extra help (Cronholm, 1999; Ignash, 1997). However, in most cases, critics of remediation frown upon its continuance and maintain that remedial education courses have minimal long-term effects on graduation rates and merely cause taxpayers to pay twice for skills that should have been developed in high school (Parker, 2007). In sum, college remediation is touted as the culprit of wasting students' time and squandering taxpayers' money (Parker, 2007).

Miles and Huberman (1994) purport that current National Center for Education Statistics estimates suggest that more than 40 million adults in the United States possess only the most basic literacy level. To this end, many analysts believe that most college students are academically underprepared, are unable to manage college-level work, and should not have been admitted into the academy in the first place (Harwood, 1997; Marcus, 2000; Trombley, 1998). For others, remediation suggests that educational institutions have lowered their admissions standards, eliminated standardized tests, and essentially "dumbed down" courses so that underprepared students can make their way through college (Bennett, 1994; MacDonald, 1997; Traub, 1995). Attewell et al. (2006) suggest that although many remedial students require enrollment in only one or two remedial courses, students are nonetheless considered overwhelmingly academically deficient, and the available resources offered by a college or university do not seem to do enough to prepare students for the intellectual life of college (Parker, 2007). As a result, Attewell et al. (2006) purport that students get bogged down taking multiple remedial courses, resulting in academic stalls or stop-outs. Remedial education, in this view, is a hoax perpetrated upon academically weak students who will be unlikely to graduate (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Rosenbaum, 2001).

The opposing view of remedial education highlights its merits, maintaining that developmental education is a necessary component of higher education, one with deep historical roots. Supporters of college remediation draw attention to the fact that the removal of developmental courses could be harmful, particularly for populations of students who have been historically under-served and under-resourced. Proponents of remediation also suggest that the phasing out of remedial options would have a long-term

impact on students as much as it would prevent students who need remedial support from transferring to, enrolling in, and graduating from four-year colleges (Lavin & Weininger, 1998; Parker, 2007). Until a greater alignment of curricula and academic requirements occurs, remedial instruction can help underprepared students access higher education (Parker, 2007). Ultimately, Merisotis and Phipps (2000) assert that the argument for offering developmental education in higher education is compelling: “Remediation is not an addition with little connection to the mission of the institution but constitutes a primary function of the higher education community, that it has performed for hundreds of years.” Parker (2007) affirms that until college preparation is addressed at the K-12 level, removing remedial programs from colleges will do little to resolve under-preparation issues.

### **Post-Traditionality and Empirical Research**

Although much has been written regarding the pros and cons of developmental education, there are significant gaps in the empirical record regarding the lived experiences of *Post-Traditional Remedial Learners*. One review noted, "Research about remedial education programs' efficacy has been sporadic, underfunded, and inconclusive" (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000, p. 75). An American Council for Education (ACE) survey found that over 40% of institutions did not identify older adult students for outreach, programs, services, or financial aid (Lakin et al., 2008). The lack of research for older students, particularly those who require remedial support, signals a nullification of this student demographic's significance and draws our attention to the breadth and width of the remediation problem in higher education, particularly in community college settings.

The dearth of literature capturing the Post-Traditional student experience is also rooted in higher education's prioritization of youth and youth culture. One way that this is evidenced is through higher education's fiscal decision-making process. Large portions of their capital budgets and campus resources are allocated to support services that prioritize traditional students. In 2014, colleges and universities spent over 12 billion dollars on construction, 78.8% of which were new constructions and facilities typically related to supporting the lifestyles of the traditional-age student, such as residential housing, physical education, and athletic complexes (Abramson, 2015). These prioritizations often highlight the misalignment between the experiences of traditional versus Post-Traditional student's on-campus. For this cause, many students feel a sense of estrangement and detachment from the college community and question the feasibility, efficacy, and necessity of attaining a college credential.

While dialogues for and against developmental education have been vigorous, the fecundity and capacity of remedial programs have only sometimes been evident despite the financial investment in remedial programs and the large proportion of U.S. post-secondary students participating in them (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012). Grubb (2001) proposes that relatively few evaluations of remedial programs have been conducted, and many existing evaluations are inconclusive or ineffective. Higher education institutions' general lack of knowledge concerning effective practices in developmental education, with a systemwide lack of alignment regarding academic proficiency, college readiness, and college knowledge, has impacted students' ability to succeed in remedial education. Additionally, there is no agreed-upon baseline of knowledge or cut-off point by which college students require remediation (Attewell et al., 2006). This leaves colleges and

universities free to establish and enact their institutional practices without regard for the impacted students. Because of the fundamental misunderstanding concerning college readiness, the pathway from secondary to post-secondary institutions is misaligned, both in standard and expectation. This misalignment is endemic, even within single institutions.

The literature also offers a general paucity of research and available data, specifically on Non-traditional learners (Cruce & Hillman, 2012). Irvine and Kevan (2017) offer that much of the research conducted is descriptive analyses in policy reports. Between 1990 and 2003, only 1% of articles in seven widely circulated peer-reviewed higher education journals focused on adult learners (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). Given the scarcity of data that centralizes *Post-Traditional Remedial Learners*, higher education institutions have had little data to consider while attempting to make institution-side changes that will address the needs of this unique demographic. When explored through the lens of the poor reception of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners on community college campuses and the current remediation rollback, the void in the literature makes this a particularly critical moment of inquiry on behalf of this underserved student demographic.

### **Post-Traditional Learners and Diversity of Need**

The heterogeneity of the adult learner's experience is difficult to conceptualize, research, evaluate and explicate. Generally, the students who stand at the intersection of Post-Traditionality and remediation have co-occurring characteristics that can delay their successful academic transport through college. Grubb's (2010) work affirms the extreme level of heterogeneity, especially among skill-deficient students in higher education.

Levin and Calcagno (2008) also posit that community college students who are designated for remedial coursework comprise a very large and diverse demographic of students:

The student's academic capabilities range from those who have done poorly in high school in all subjects to students who are deficient in just one academic subject. Many older students performed acceptably in their high school studies but have rusty skills because of disuse. Others have ineffective study habits or mild to serious learning problems that must be addressed. In addition, many colleges have significant immigrant populations who may possess the underlying academic skills for college-level work but have difficulty with English (English as a Second Language [ESL] students). This wide array of student types suggests that long-term solutions must be diverse and inclusive.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learners also enter college or university with a broad range of social, familial, and work obligations, directly impacting their ability to persist in college. Because of the coupling of these academic and social factors, developing a universal or standardized approach to developmental education has proven to be elusive. To be effective, developmental education curriculums must be reimaged to reflect the breadth and width of the diverse population colleges seek to serve. Adelman (1998) affirms that 'remediation' in higher education is not a monolithic plague that a single prescription or panacea can cure. Instead, the full range of each student's learning style, educational needs, and lived experiences must be considered.

Within this context, we view adult learners through the lens of what Chen (2017) calls 'the square peg in a round hole' view of students. While almost half of today's

overall college student body are adult learners (Altbach et al., 2005), many facets of higher education are not designed with adult learners in mind (Tannehill, 2009). Students are expected to be conformable to the institutional models and implementations that exist instead of the institution being responsive and dynamic within their approach to student engagement. As higher educational institutions grapple with differing opinions regarding who should gain college access and which academic, social, and experiential resources should be available, the PTL population's needs continue to burgeon. These institutional 'issues' become systemic blind spots or barriers that stymie the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner's ability to connect to the college community and persist toward degree acquisition.

The Post-Traditional Remedial Learner in community college often faces the upward battle of building momentum towards graduation under the weight of an educational system that needs them financially but does not focus on creating compelling learning experiences which cater to them academically. Mintz (2020) affirms that Post-Traditional Learners represent a vast, untapped market that holds the key to a steady flow of learners who may be seeking higher education but have not yet been engaged within the marketplace. Tapping into this robust and growing market would be an equitable approach to student support and a commonsense approach to institutional growth and posterity.

### **Foundations of Education and Connection to Post-Traditionality**

The history of education in America began as an outgrowth of social and societal change. Though unable, in many instances, to provide an education akin to what they experienced in England, early settlers sought to find creative ways to educate their young.

Most children received what little education they could from home until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, few schools were available, and those provided schooling for about 10 to 12 weeks per year. This was established so the privileged few could attend school for a brief period before returning home to tend to their families' budding homesteads. In the wake of the American Revolutionary War, riots and upheavals were prevalent, prompting governmental leaders to seek ways and means to quell the instability and help develop national norms and values. Government leaders feared that the democratic virtues of the United States would not be upheld because the citizenry was uneducated and unable to maintain them (Reese, 2011). This was the impetus behind the development of schools. After years of contentious debate, educational reform began to gain traction. Educational reformers like Horace Mann created and helped pass legislation providing the necessary funding to build primary schools. The increase in primary schools necessitated the training of qualified teachers, and the creation of '*normal schools*' later satisfied that need (Ogren, 2005).

While the first '*normal school*' opened its doors in 1839, it was not until the 1890s that they became prevalent in society. In the 1920s, '*normal schools*' were renamed "teachers' colleges" and maintained that name until the 1940s. In the 1960s, the nomenclature changed again when "teachers' colleges" joined the state university educational system (Dunham, 1969; Ogren, 2005; Selingo, 2000). Although '*normal schools*' were not as highly respected as traditional colleges (Parr, 1888), they were firmly established in their mission to generate skillful teachers (Baldwin, 1888; Null, 2007; Parsons, 1890). Traditional colleges of the late 1800s and early 1900s specifically served men from wealthy backgrounds who attended college to build character and

network with other men from wealthy families (Tellis, 1997). In contrast, *'normal schools'* served older adults from lower socioeconomic classes with family and work obligations and that attended school part-time (Ogren, 2005). Fully aware of their adult students' unconventional and transient nature (Payne, 1887), *'normal school'* administrators adapted their practices to meet the needs of the students (Parsons, 1890). While most colleges of the time welcomed traditional students only, the *'normal schools'* were the earliest exemplar of institutions that provided a range of supports for non-traditional students, allowing them a space to build community, participate in collegial activities, and develop leadership skills (Ogren, 2005).

The second significant ingress of non-traditional students came after World War II when veterans were furnished educational benefits through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also termed the "GI Bill." The GI Bill was initially introduced to help veterans whose education was interrupted by the war to return to college to complete their college degrees (Remenick, 2019). This was very controversial because many policymakers vehemently opposed allowing service persons to participate in college; they believed college was designated for traditionally aged students only. However, in 1945, because of dissenting public opinion, Congress allowed veterans over 25 to enroll in college and increased the time veterans could obtain their degrees (Olson, 1973).

It was initially thought that this new, *'non-traditional student'* would corrupt higher education and the traditional students who studied therein. However, veterans were successful despite the initial concerns and were consistently hailed for their stability and maturity (Fred, 1951). In truth, they were found to have higher grades than their

traditional counterparts. The proponents of the GI Bill proved to the nation that non-traditional students could succeed in higher education and that federal funding would cover tuition and substantially increase enrollment (Olson, 1973). Consequently, institutions began to accommodate the needs of veteran students in a similar fashion to the '*normal schools*' of the previous era. Colleges offered substantive allowances for the GIs, including but not limited to credit for military experience, more remedial courses, flexibility in their mandated policies and curriculum (Olson, 1973), and counselors on campus who were specifically designated to serve their unique needs (Toven, 1945).

### **History of Remediation in Higher Education**

Remediation has been a primary function within academia since the 1600's when it was ushered into existence by colleges like Harvard, established in 1636, William and Mary, established in 1693, and Yale, established in 1701 (Breneman & Haarlow, 1998). The primary goal of the establishment of remediation practices was to preserve newly imported European cultural norms, train the clergy, and provide tutelage for what was to become the new ruling elites (Arendale, 2011). Reitano (1999) affirms that traditional liberal arts colleges were designed to prepare the young elite, Protestant, white men for service in the commonwealth, specifically as clerics. There was little room for other diverse groups and few advocates for open-access collegial education.

The doors of wisdom were not only not open, but they were also shut tight and designed to remain that way..... by the end of the colonial period, there was a well-developed ideology of racial inferiority to justify that situation and ensure that it would stand firm against all the heady rhetoric of the American Revolution. (Cremin,1970, p. 412).

Developmental education was born out of a sociological, political, and cultural context that was elitist. Yet, the students born to wealthy families who hailed from privileged backgrounds were often ill-prepared academically and unable to be fully admitted to college due to their academic deficiencies. These deficiencies resulted from poor or non-existent primary and secondary educational systems. Precollege academic assistance was commonly required and consisted of private tutors who prepared students for college entrance examinations and the development of good moral character.

The first formal remedial education courses in reading, writing, and math were offered at the University of Wisconsin in 1849 (Breneman & Haarlow, 1998; Shaw, 1997). Principally, remediation was widespread in higher education in the 1800s through college preparatory and tutoring programs run by colleges and universities. “The practice was so extensive that in 1889 eighty percent of all post-secondary institutions had such programs.” (Clowes, 1992, p. 461). During the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, remediation’s educational reach continued to expand, and educational opportunities were made available to various constituents regardless of race, culture, creed, or social status. The Federal Government played a pivotal role in this evolution by providing access points for student populations on the fringe of society. In many cases, they were previously prohibited from attending college and pursuing academic advancement opportunities.

During this historical era, the federal government’s involvement in higher education manifested in many ways including through elevated levels of institutional accountability and oversight, research and innovation, international engagement, and an open-door policy for all students (Lane, 2004). Programs that were designed for the adult learner expanded, catalyzing a sharp increase in colleges’ enrollment and developmental

education offerings. Important to note is the exponential growth that occurred because of the advent of the *'Information Age,'* the birth of the internet, and the expansion of the world wide web. This contemporary era ushered in a new arena for learning—online learning (Harasim, 2000).

The percentage of institutions offering developmental education increased steadily during the 1970s, and legislatively mandated assessment testing began in the 1980s (Breneman & Haarlow, 1998). At that time, most states discovered that about 30% of their first-time freshman students lacked at least one essential skill or developmental area. The public college's acute growth appeared to align with the mission of open-access institutions, as stated by the Board of Higher Education in its 1972 master plan. This included its commitment to help disrupt the perpetual patterns of poverty, ignorance, and discrimination to which the poor and unlearned often become intertwined. Although open enrollment has bolstered this mission, the master plan upon which the system was built has not yet been realized.

### **Remediation in CUNY Community College's**

The 1998 dismantling of remediation within the City University of New York system began at the senior college level, as ordered by the Board of Trustees of The City University of New York. This ideological and political time of transformation marked the advent of a new era in public education. Factors which included rising admissions standards and reduced federal emphasis on affirmative action were instrumental in this ideological shift. Then-Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, and Governor Pataki pushed the initiative, resulting in the 'historic' 9 to 6 roll-back of remediation for The City University of New York (Healy, 1998). Oudenhoven (2002) reports that in 1998, after more than

two decades of open-access education, the CUNY Board of Trustees mandated that open-access enrollment would be phased out at the CUNY four-year colleges and be limited to one year of remediation at the two-year institutions. This action made community colleges chiefly responsible for remediation in the CUNY system. Most recently, the remediation rollback has extended to CUNY community colleges providing limited opportunities for stand-alone developmental education. Instead, colleges have begun to link pre-requisite or remedial educational information within the context of college coursework.

### **Post-Traditionality and Community College Settings**

Community colleges, dubbed the “people’s college,” accept a heterogeneous student demographic and provide essential services to the surrounding communities; these practices are central to its historical roots and present-day mission (Levinson, 2004). A considerable strength of the American higher education system (Morphew, 2009), institutional diversity as an “ideological pillar” (Birnbaum, 1983), has permitted colleges and universities to serve a diverse student population and their needs more effectively; it has both provided opportunities to those historically underserved, as well as removed barriers to both access and entry. Despite the community college’s mission of providing inclusive institutions that welcome all students who aspire to learn, regardless of status, wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience, the institution's open-door policy does not necessarily connote equity or unhindered access. A natural byproduct of the acceptance of a wide array of students is the increase in the number of students who require developmental education options; this component has become expansive and costly.

True to its original designation, the community college is positioned within higher education as the most engaged institution with developmental education. The institutional policies of many senior colleges restrict the admission of students who require developmental education and often direct such students to community colleges (Lane, 2004). However, broadening access without the provision of strategic support, which prioritizes curriculum development, access to campus resources, and student success initiatives, does not proffer ‘access’ in its truest sense. Without an aerial view of the needs of Post-Traditional Students who require remedial support, their full participation in college will be thwarted. However, few guidelines have been provided to outline how this should be enacted. Within this context, the provision of college admission has been seen as a more procedural function and not as a part of any systematic plan of action that would motivate students to persist.

### **Post-Traditionality and Student Support Services**

The Post-Traditional Learner possesses unique characteristics inherent to their positionality as adult learners. Whether sociological, physical, or educational, their pragmatic view of the world and real-life concerns influence their decision to enroll and persist in college. The diversity of needs within this student population is limitless. Each PTRL possesses a unique set of circumstances that may, to a greater or lesser extent, include dispositional or situational barriers that impact their ability to attend college. Also, the interrelationship among these characteristics further complicates their academic trajectory. While Post-Traditional Students comprise a significant portion of higher education consumers, institutions still need to accommodate their needs adequately. Many higher education institutions administer policies such as open admissions and part-

time enrollment that initially cater to and engage nontraditional students; however, these efforts yield a slight difference in degree attainment compared with more traditional student populations (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005).

Student support efforts and service initiatives which focalize Post-Traditional Learners must also be foregrounded within the institutional narrative, embodied within the institutional structure, and be evidenced through the work of the college president, executive leadership team, faculty, professional staff members, Board of Trustees, special programs, advisement units, and campus partners. The organizational governance of the college must engage in a '*Post-Traditional Student Partnership.*' That relationship must manifest itself *practically*, from the fiduciary duties and data-driven decision-making of the college's leadership to opening offices during evening hours and providing quality staff members committed to serving the Post-Traditional student. In many cases, institutions have taken little to no care regarding integrating Post-Traditional students into campus life. Vicariously, many PTLs feel a sense of social isolation and lack of belonging; this can negatively impact their successful outcomes (Wyatt, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The Post-Traditional Remedial Learner, as evidenced within the literature, has catalyzed social, political, cultural, and educational change through every pivotal juncture in academic history. Whether through the early years at Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale or through the historical eras when 'normal schools' became teachers' colleges, and students who were systemically excluded because of their age, gender, or race were included in academia, PTRLs have stood the test of time. They have been an integral part of the higher education story making their omission in literature more grossly negligent.

Now, as this student demographic stands in a place of numeric authority, academic institutions can prioritize the PTRLs, heeding and honoring the voice of their lived experiences. An active approach to their engagement will strengthen, maintain, and sustain the connection to this student populous and ensure the long-term trajectory, health, and vitality of institutions of higher learning as they emerge and evolve in preparation for the next generation of learners.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The principal aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners enrolled in a specific developmental education program within a community college setting and to discover which factors affect persistence and successful academic outcomes. Through this descriptive, single case study analysis, the researcher will also explore how a specific community college setting supports Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework and how the role of executive team members, administrators, instructors, and advisors engender student success. This chapter is divided into four sections—first, an overview of the logic of inquiry. Second, the qualitative approaches’ connection to the Constructivist philosophical paradigm. The third is an explication of the case study method, and the fourth is a review of the research questions, rationale, design, and participant commentary.

### **The Logic of Inquiry**

A qualitative research design was selected to explore the complex concepts and differing perceptions of Post-Traditional students with developmental needs. The benefit of the qualitative design lies in its ability to examine specific instances while illuminating the general problem and population under review (Merriam, 1998; Ponterotto, 2005; Tinto, 2008). Quantitative research, in contrast, seeks to contextualize data numerically, gaining a detailed understanding of information to discover trends, make inferences, and develop generalizations that may later be applied to other situations and settings. Mixed Study Research analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study.

## **Philosophical Paradigm**

This study will focus on the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners through a constructivist philosophical paradigm. In sociological research, the term “paradigm” refers to the researcher’s philosophical presumptions, beliefs, and theoretical posture (Lincoln et al., 2011). Honebein (1996) describes the constructivist intellectual paradigm as an approach that postulates that people construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and then reflecting on those experiences. Kurlaender and Howell (2012) affirm that in using the constructivist philosophical paradigm, learning occurs only when the student discovers knowledge through the iterative and time-tested process of trial and error; the familiar, ‘rote learning paradigm’ of *chew, pour, pass, and forget*, is nullified (Mogashoa, 2014). Instead, the learning experience is envisioned as cyclically edifying for the students and faculty members who serve them.

Utilizing a Constructivist lens within this study provides an appropriate empirical research strategy and a theory that can serve as both lens and logic to the challenge of Post-Traditionality in community college settings. Maxwell (2010) purports that no tenable empirical study can be theory-free. A constructivist epistemology guides the reasoning behind the researchers’ methodological choices. It helps explore how Post-Traditional Remedial Learners negotiate the ‘remedial’ experience, how they adapt to and overcome institutional barriers, and how they balance faculty and institutional perceptions.

## **Research Method and Rationale**

The research method employed in this study is a descriptive case study analysis. Tellis (1997) purports that case study analyses are multi-perspectival. The researcher foregrounds the voice and perspective of the Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and selected Educational Leaders within the community college setting. Based on the review of existing literature, the case study analytical approach is advantageous when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest, within its natural, real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011). Yin (2014) propounds at least four rationales for the use of a case study model:

1. To explain complex causal links in real-life interventions
2. To explicate the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred
3. To describe the intervention itself
4. To explore situations in which the intervention has no clear set of outcomes

Case studies are instrumental in research studies because they are a triangulated research strategy (Amankwaa, 2016). The use of multiple data sources will be used within this investigation, including interviews of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners, document analysis, and a focus group centralizing the voices of educational leaders who work directly with this demographic. Within the context of this study, the methodological strategy helped to enhance understanding and to establish external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirm that researchers see triangulation as a method for substantiating findings and testing validity. Rather than recognizing triangulation simply as a method for validating or verifying data, qualitative researchers use this technique to ensure that a rich, robust, comprehensive, and well-developed account of the researched phenomenon

is provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this cause, conducting a case study analysis is ideal when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required (Feagin et al., 1991).

### **Research Questions**

The guiding questions for this qualitative study are:

**RQ 1:** What are the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 2:** What motivates administrators, instructors, and advisors to work with and support Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 3:** What are the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?

### **Research Setting**

The context or setting of a research study can be described as a physical location, a historical event, or a social condition shared among the members of a particularized group (Creswell, 2012). This study's context was a community college within a large metropolitan area.

#### **Table 2**

##### *Research Setting Overview*

<b>Case Study at Clearview Community College</b>	
Geographic Location	(Clearview – a town in Northeast, US)
Campus Buildings and Grounds	45 acres / 35 buildings
Total Number of Students:	7,265
Student Enrollment by Gender (Fall 2021)	Female - 4,323, Male - 2,942
% of students who are Clearview residents:	77%
% of Post-Traditional Students	32%
Three-Year Graduation Rate	19.5%

Diversity of Enrolled Students	36% Black or African American, 56% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Asian / Pacific Islander, 4% White
Diversity of Full-Time Faculty:	16.8% Black or African American, 15.5% Hispanic /Latino, 14.2 Asian Pacific Islander, .3% Native American, 50.3% White,
Diversity of 'Dev-ED <i>Lift</i> ' Program Instructors:	50% Black / African American, 12.5% Hispanic / Latino, 12.5% Asian, 25% White,
Dev-Ed <i>Lift</i> Program Yearly Enrollment:	350
Teaching Delivery Model:	In-Person, Hybrid, On-Line
Common Student Concerns/Worries:	Food Insufficiency 37%, Housing Costs 69%
Household Income <15k	40%

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As Table 2 indicates, Clearview Community College is a non-residential, public junior college situated within a more extensive system of Community Colleges in the Northeast United States. The college inhabits 45 acres of land and boasts 35 buildings, with an approximate student population of 7,265 students, 77% of whom reside in the area. The ethnic diversity of the student body is categorized this way, 56% Latino/Hispanic, 36% Black/African American, 4% White, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islander. Data indicates that 71% of the student body are first-generation students, many of whom share common challenges surrounding poverty, food insufficiency (37% of students), and difficulty with housing costs (69% of students). The faculty members who teach the PTRLs represent a range of ethnicities, 50% African American, 25% White, and 12.5% for both Hispanic / Latino and Asian. Essential to this discussion of Post-Traditional Learners are the cultural and sociological contexts from which the students hail and the situational barriers that impact their full participation in college.

As we further contextualize the campus community in which the program is embedded, it is essential to note the surrounding community and some of the challenges and problems that are commonplace. Magnified levels of trauma typify the surrounding campus community of Clearview Community College and are evident in many ways, including but not limited to elevated levels of violence, poor high school graduation rates, and the prevalence of overcrowding in low-income rental housing. The challenges occur in tandem with multi-generational and multidimensional poverty that touches every aspect of daily life, from the nutritional quality of food and health care to the available jobs and higher educational advancement.

The college is a central figure within this context and is the home of a diverse racial and ethnic student populous: 62.2% Hispanic or Latino, 28.2% Black or African American, 3.23% Asian, 2.32% White, 1.05%, Two or more races, 0.249 American Indian or Alaska Native, and .11% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders.

### **Research Participants**

For this study, the researcher selected 21 participants, twelve Post-Traditional Remedial Learners from the Dev-ED*Lift* program, ages 25 to 75, and nine institutional leaders whose professional roles span from executive leadership to college advisement. The Dev-Ed*Lift* scholars represent a cross-section of traditional and Post-Traditional Students identities within the community college setting. It's primary goal is to meet students at the point of their academic need and to help them to gain academic proficiency, critical skills, and college knowledge before starting their matriculated classes. Embedded with student support and services, the program is primarily targeted and designed for first-year student, however it serves any student who requires

remediation support. For this study, each selected student possessed a range of Post-Traditional attributes and was eligible to participate by meeting the age eligibility requirement.

Kowalsky et al. (1996) purport that if research is helpful for the group being studied, it must be designed and implemented in conjunction with community members, stakeholders, and leaders. For this cause, college administrators and faculty members were included in the participant pool in anticipation of learning from their varied experiences and perspectives. Their participation in the study will also satisfy the need for stakeholder involvement and the presence of diverse perspectives. Tables 3 and 4, below provide an overview of the study’s participants.

**Table 3**

*One-on-One Interview Participants*

Participant Pseudonym	Perceived Gender	Age of PTRL	# of Perceived Post-Traditional attributes	Enrollment Status	Major	Dev-Ed Need (English, Math, both)
Adam Woods	Male	40	Seven	PT	Physical Therapy	Math
Adelita Sincera	Female	25	Two	FT	Nursing	Math
Shyā Love	Female	28	One	FT	Psychology	Math
Hibo Truth	Female	35	Four	PT	Nursing	Math
Jabari Strong	Male	38	Six	PT	Nursing	English
Emanuel Worth	Male	60	Six	FT	Business	Math
Pilar Alejo	Female	47	Seven	PT	Nursing	English & Math
Reneē Joy	Female	38	Six	PT	Nursing	Math
Shirley Shiloh	Female	42	Six	PT	Accounting	Math
Senara Imani	Female	37	Seven	PT	Nursing	Math

Timothy Wise	Male	72	Four	PT	Life-long Learner	Math
Yólanda Paz	Female	49	Six	PT	Nursing	Math

\*Perceived Post Traditional Characteristics (1. Delayed Enrollment, 2. Did not earn a standard High School Diploma, 3. Financial Independence, 4. Part-Time college enrollment, 5. Dependents, 6. Single Parents, 7. Full-Time Employment)

**Table 4**

*Focus Group Participants*

Participant Names Pseudonym	Position	Years of Experience working with Adult Learners	Level of Academic Degree	Personal Post Traditional Characteristics
Ms. Sabrina Owens	Senior Administrator	20	Master's	N
Ms. Mahati Vala	Advisor	9	Master's	N
Dr. Brandon Greene	Executive Leader	20	Doctorate	Y
Dr. Cassandra Ulm	Department Chairperson	15	Doctorate	N
Ms. Tameca Ferguson	Administrator	7	Master's	Y
Ms. Trinity Bach	Faculty (FT)	8	Master's	N
Ms. Kassondra Lee	Faculty (PT)	5	Master's	N
Ms. Elondra Pardo	Senior Administrator	7	Master's	Y
Mr. Jose Luis	Dean	15	Master's	Y

**Participant Selection**

The participants were selected through the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling. The researcher selected this data collection method because it allowed the researcher to select participants who directly embody the attributes upon which the research hinges. Purposive sampling was also selected in anticipation of the goal of saturation (i.e., obtaining a comprehensive understanding by continuing to sample until no new substantive information is acquired) instead of generalizability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All the students were selected from an unrestrictive pool of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners within the Dev-Ed*Lift* program; any interested student aged 25 and up was welcome to participate. To initiate this process, the researcher requested to be allowed to speak to the students. During the initial meeting, the researcher distributed the student participation questionnaires and identified possible candidates for the study. This initial meeting took place at the beginning of their advisor-led seminar class. It is important to note that the Dev-ED*Lift* program utilizes a cohort, collaboration-focused learning model where students work together to complete a program or learning module successfully.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 1 | Mr. Adam Woods

Adam was born and raised in Staten Island, New York. Articulate, charismatic, and deeply emotional, he is a 40-year-old African American male and the only child raised by a single mother and grandmother. He attended elementary and junior high school but was disillusioned with the entire ‘education thing’ and lacked motivation despite his natural learning abilities. Disinterested and dismayed, he dropped out of high school after finding he was to become a father. He notes that during this time in his life, he could not see the value of education, what schools would teach him that he did not already know and how he would use that knowledge in the future. After deciding to drop out of high school, he started working full-time to make ends meet for his new role as a dad. Though a teenager, he was fully committed to being a good father and supporting his newborn daughter. Years later, he decided to pursue his GED as his growing family, which then included three daughters, needed to have more financial resources and, more

importantly, a strong male role model that could show his daughters the best of manhood and what he hoped they would look for in future partners. As the only male in his family line, he felt saddened that he was the only person without a college degree. He said, *“I mean, I am smart enough to go to college, too; why not do that.”* So, In 2004 after passing his GED, he applied to college and took a placement exam which landed him in remedial classes. He failed the Math and Writing portions of the exam but passed the Reading. He became discouraged and did not continue at that time because he did not want to attend remedial classes; he wanted to enter college and ‘get right to’ his matriculated classes.

A military brat, he looked to his mother for support and information about ‘college,’ but reportedly, *“She left him out to dry on that one.”* Instead, his mom encouraged him to figure it out on his own. This deepened his sense of discouragement. Adam stated that as a result, he got so discouraged that he did not bother pursuing college for almost twenty years. He found a job working for the state with the mentally challenged, and after 17 years on the job, he remains an employee, earning approximately 40k per year with little to no opportunity for advancement.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 2 | Ms. Adelita Sincera

Adelita, bright, amenable, and timorous, was born and raised in The Bronx, New York. A 25-year-old woman of Mexican descent, she is deeply committed to her family and, despite challenges related to an early terminated pregnancy, always desired to continue in school and to be an excellent example for her two younger siblings. Adelita wanted to be successful in high school but was stymied by other personal issues like mental challenges, body dysmorphia, and social anxiety. She reports that she never really

got professional help, but her family helped her through the tough times. She was inspired to return to school when her older brother graduated from college.

Fear and anxiety were the hallmarks of her early life experiences, but she overcame those feelings to apply to college. She then feared being the oldest in her classes, being isolated, and not finding other people within the college setting with whom she might engage and find companionship. She remembers feeling intimidated in school because the educational leaders always seemed ‘so scary and inaccessible.’ She now wishes to go back and do it all over again but acknowledged that if she had enrolled in college directly out of high school, she would have dropped out right away. She reports being too nervous and intimidated and dealing with her mental problems. She said, “*I would have been suffering; honestly, I just was not ready.*” Now, she is surprised at how capable she is in college and is excited about the future. The paid primary caregiver for her maternal grandmother, she works what she calls *a little job* to ensure that her grandmother is taken care of properly, takes her medication, and is treated the way she deserves while attending school full time.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 3 | Ms. Shyā Love

Shyā, sensitive, altruistic, and determined, was born and raised in New York City. Of Dominican ancestry, this 28-year-old student has always loved school but had a challenging journey as a plus-sized child. Bullied and mishandled in school, she loved education but hated the school environment and the mistreatment she regularly endured. Because of this, she changed schools often for most of her secondary school career, attending several high schools before she graduated. A naturally creative person, she wanted to follow in her mother’s footsteps to become a fashion designer. This dream did

not seem feasible because she was discouraged by her perceptions regarding the cutthroat nature of the fashion industry. Instead, she found, through her last high school, what she believes to be her life's calling, to be a psychologist. Deeply moved by people who bear unaddressed emotional and psychological scars, she wants to build an accessible practice for low-income persons. Firsthand experiences as she supported friends with mental challenges, those hospitalized for depression, and one who committed suicide, have instilled this life mission within her. She also experienced bouts of depression and illness which delayed her entrance into community college. She sees every circumstance she has experienced as a hurdle she had to overcome to achieve greatness.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 4 | Ms. Hibo Truth

Hibo, sober, wise, and industrious, hails from The Republic of Guinea, West Africa. A 35-year-old wife and the mother of four children came to the United States in 2016, not speaking English or knowing anything about American culture. She aligned with a program designed to teach English and learned to speak fluently within three semesters. Always an exceptionally bright child, Hibo loved school but lacked opportunity. After marriage, all hopes of attending college seemed lost. However, a discussion with her 8-year-old daughter, where she lied to her daughter about her occupation, propelled her to seek enrollment in community college and explore her lifelong dream of becoming a registered nurse.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 5 | Mr. Jabari Strong

Jabari, deliberate, contemplative, and determined, was born in West Africa. A 38-year-old husband and father of three children credit his wife for helping him become inspired to align with the local community college in hopes of completing his

developmental education milestones and earning a degree in nursing. Currently working as a nurse's aide, he is inspired to see the benefits of having a good education. He is preparing to sacrifice the next three to five years of his life and says, *"If he cannot take his children for ice cream, they will have to understand."* He is ready for the next chapter in his life and desires to have persons willing to support him and provide a helping hand. He said, *"As an adult learner, you need someone to navigate you and help you whether you are 18 or 80, so you do not waste too much time"*.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 6 | Mr. Emanuel Worth

Articulate, worldly, and persistent, Emanuel is a single, 60-year-old African American man and father of two daughters and one son. A self-proclaimed disabled person as the result of an accident that befell him in 2011, he was eager to relay that he is not *handicapped, just disabled* because he can still do some things for himself. Propelled by the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, he began to think more deeply about the next phase of life and strategize how to do something more satisfying with the remaining time. He remembers telling himself, *"Why don't you do something with yourself, go to school and try to get a degree."* This was always a latent desire in his heart because education for his family was always a significant value; most of his family members, including all his five sisters, earned a college degree, but he and his son have not. Instead, he enlisted in the military and spent much of his life serving his country. A proud man, he said he wants to earn the degree as a sense of accomplishment and to maintain his family's legacy. More importantly, he wants to show his son, who is going through a period of difficult circumstances, that he can excel too. He said, *"Perhaps we can both attend college and hold up a degree together as a sense of accomplishment at the end."*

#### Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 7 | Pilar Alejo

Bold, intense, and committed, Pilar, a Puerto Rican woman of 47 years, decided to enroll in college to become a nurse. She held that dream from age 25 but would only attend college after raising her four kids. A hands-on mom, she was unwilling to compromise their care, comfort, or futures to advance her own. She shared, *“I want my kids to know that there is no time limit on doing what you want to do in life.”* She says, *“You just have to go forward and never accept failure.”*

#### Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 8 | Renee Joy

Astute, engaging, and energetic, Renee, a 38-year-old African American woman born and raised in the Bronx, NY, has determined to enroll in college to earn her nursing degree. From her earliest remembrances, she always wanted to become a nurse and has worked in the health field in varying capacities for the past decade. Admittedly reluctant to dedicate the time to return to school, she perceives the financial and familial toll on her family, impeding her college enrollment. Considerations like not having enough money to raise her only daughter and not having the time to *‘raise her right’* also give her trepidation. Although reluctant to return to school, she has enrolled and is looking forward to finally reaching her goal of becoming a registered nurse.

#### Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 9 | Shirley Shiloh

Formidable, determined, and nurturing, Shirley is a 42-year-old African American woman with six children between 5 and 25 years old. Having just completed her GED, she is positioned to finish her developmental milestones and pursue a degree in accounting. Her children are her inspiration, and she wants her education to be an excellent example. She said, *“How can I tell them to stay in school and to do the right*

*things if I am not doing them?"* Shirley has always had two lifelong vocational dreams- becoming an attorney or an accountant. After witnessing what she perceives as the saturation of the legal field and the associated stress, she has opted for a career as an accountant. She has always loved numbers and feels well-suited for this vocation.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 10 | Senara Imani

Senara is a 37-year-old woman from South Africa who is committed, eager, and determined to succeed. A busy mom, she has always prioritized her children and her family. Still, after coming to the United States in 2017, she began to desire more regarding her professional development. Her desire to become a nurse burgeoned from witnessing the heroes of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the doctors and nurses who sacrificed themselves for others and vicariously became part of something she calls *'truly great!* Observing their service and sacrifice filled her with a new purpose and a heartfelt desire to be a part of that vocation. Because of her early academic decisions (i.e., avoiding math /opting out of taking math in high school), she believes that she is missing something. She says, *"It is like the whole world knows a special language that I do not know."* The decision not to take math, she believes, put her on a path to being less than her best self. She also explained that her parents were uneducated and could not provide guidance. Born and raised during apartheid, they had few opportunities for academic advancement; vicariously, she was raised similarly. Enrolling in college has had many challenges for her and her family, but she is determined to learn math, recoup the lost opportunities, and fulfill her dream of becoming a nurse.

#### Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 11 | Timothy Wise

Timothy is a single African American male in his 70's, knowledgeable, resolute, and a lifelong learner. His educational pathway has spanned over many decades and has stemmed the flood of many of the changes that have resulted since the onset of the information age. With each changing era, he attempted to adapt and remain relevant while battling physical and '*suspected and unassessed*' learning disabilities. He enrolled in college not so much for the degree but instead so he would not lose his ability to think critically and grow. Seeking to bridge the gap between old and new technologies and educational ideologies has been difficult for him. He says, "*Without furthering his education, the world will pass him by!*"

#### Post-Traditional Remedial Learner 12 | Yólanda Paz

Motivated, self-reliant, and tenacious, Yolanda is a 49-year-old Dominican mother of three adult children and one child with a neurological condition, Spina Bifida. Deeply grieved over her contentious relationship with her 18-year-old disabled child, she expressed exasperation, desperation, and disillusionment over their seemingly insurmountable chasm. Yolanda, a survivor of domestic abuse, has been separated from her husband for over a decade. She cites financial challenges as the reason for not finalizing her separation in a divorce. Overcome with depression and stress, she reportedly sees a therapist weekly, so she does not, in her words, '*go bananas.*' A home health aide worker, she also takes care of her ailing mother, cooking, cleaning, and tending to her needs before attempting to complete her developmental courses online at night. For her, college is a way out of the darkness; she is determined to succeed and reach her goals.

#### Focus Group Participant 1 | Ms. Sabrina Owens

Ms. Owens, an African American woman in her mid-forties, currently serves as a Senior Administrator at Clearview Community College. She has enjoyed an extensive career in community college leadership, focalizing program development for students with developmental needs. She believes her work with the PTRL community is transformational. Inspired by the failure of her older brother, a Post-Traditional Remedial Learner within the community college setting, she has committed her life's work to improve opportunities for their development and successful completion of their academic credentials.

#### Focus Group Participant 2 | Ms. Mahati Vala

Ms. Vala, a South Indian woman in her late forties, currently serves as a college advisor for the DevEd *Lift* program at Clearview Community College. Committing her life's work to remedial learners, she sees herself as a legacy keeper for her biological family. She holds space for students to develop their legacy and connection to the big picture, passion, and life. Deeply impacted by her collegial career, Mahati does everything she can to provide access to resources and opportunities for this student demographic and has done so in this capacity for approximately ten years.

#### Focus Group Participant 3 | Dr. Brandon Greene

Dr. Greene, an African American man in his early 60's, currently serves as an executive leader at Clearview Community College. A committed higher education leader for over 20 years, his unwavering optimism and '*Never Say Die*' mindset continues to distinguish him as one who will touch students' lives, relate to their lived experiences, meet their needs, and institute policies that will impact their life's trajectory. With

characteristics and signs of giftedness in student development, he brings a hands-on, real-world approach to each student interaction. Ever mindful that each adult learner comes with a unique story, Dr. Greene can work with the most recalcitrant or amenable students and find common ground to engage them.

#### Focus Group Participant 4 | Dr. Cassandra Ulm

Dr. Ulm, a Caucasian woman in her mid-fifties, currently serves as English Department Chair and tenured professor at Clearview Community College. As a conciliator for her team of professors and professional staff, she spends a good deal of her time finding compromise, bringing people together, and keeping her proverbial hands on the pulse of students' needs. Dr. Ulm brings a wealth of knowledge and 15 years of experience as a teacher and educational leader to her practice. She is interested in finding ways to reduce the pressure and stress for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and to help build space within the community college setting for this student demographic to thrive.

#### Focus Group Participant 5 | Ms. Tameca Ferguson

Ms. Ferguson, a Caribbean woman of African descent in her late thirties, is a college administrator of uncompromising commitment. She leads a premier department that caters to all first-year students who enter Clearview Community College. She uses her experience as an international student and her knowledge about the deep needs of learners who require developmental education to shape her practice and programming. She champions the cause of student development by helping them develop resilience and confidence through the unique curriculum she created for the students at the college. She credits her success and growth to the college leaders she encountered after coming to the United States as a diffident international student.

Focus Group Participant 6 | Ms. Trinity Bach

Ms. Bach, a Caucasian woman in her late 40's, serves as a non-tenured English faculty member of the Dev-ED*Lift* program at Clearview Community College. A second-generation educator, she has a heart for the Post Traditional Remedial Student and has served them in different capacities for over a decade. She believes that being attuned to the PTRLs needs is critical and brings a greater sense of kindness to the work. She says that she now realizes that as important as school is, at the end of the day, their families, their jobs, and all the other things they need to do must be in place to make attending and advancing in college possible. She likes to know as much of her student's individual stories as they feel comfortable sharing, so she can better serve them.

Focus Group Participant 7 | Ms. Kelly Lee

Ms. Lee, an African American woman in her early thirties, serves as a Math Instructor for the Dev-Ed*Lift* program at Clearview Community College. A gifted educator, she sees herself as a bridge of support for the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner. Acutely aware of this student demographic's diverse range of experiences and needs, she empathizes with these students' immense responsibility. Further, she expressed that so many PTRLs have decided to put themselves on the back burner for years, and now she sees her role as one who will pull them to the front, saying, "No, we are here to help you; It is your time." She affirms that she is a bridge to help her students across and hopes to enable them to transition as seamlessly as possible.

Focus Group Participant 8 | Ms. Elondra Pardo

Ms. Pardo, a Hispanic woman in her 50s, serves as the director of a college preparatory program that helps students prepare for the High School Equivalency (HSE)

exam, gain college proficiency, and complete their collegial coursework. Her openness to all students and her awareness of ‘trauma’ as a factor of the human experience causes her to lead her program with an uncommon level of empathy and an abiding commitment to justice for all students.

Focus Group Participant 9 | Mr. Jose Luis

Mr. Luis, a man of Hispanic origin, serves as an executive leader at Clearview Community College. Well-versed in collegial systems, he oversees one of the most extensive programs on campus, helping all students, including the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner. Committed to student growth, he identifies ‘Belonging’ as one of the essential components of the PTRL’s collegial experience. Staying connected to his transition into college as an international student keeps him on the cutting edge of student development.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

This qualitative study's chosen data collection instruments were interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The interviews and focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured interview/focus group protocol. The researcher asked open-ended questions that encouraged respondents to share their lived experiences as educators who support PTRLs or as Post-Traditional Remedial learners and the impact that remediation has had on their successful transition into college. Through semi-structured interview questions, the researcher anticipated that other questions would emerge during the exchanges and lead to more substantive discourse.

The semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted via the Webex Video Conferencing platform. One interview was conducted for each participant, lasting

approximately 60 minutes per participant. One focus group was also conducted with college leaders who serve Post-Traditional Remedial Learners in various capacities. The focus group interview observed a maximum scheduled time of 90 minutes. The researcher employed a focus group discussion protocol that drew upon the institutional leaders' and faculty members' knowledge and experiences.

The literature provides many definitions for focus groups. Commonly perceived as a semi-structured collaborative discourse within a dynamic group setting, a focus group's most significant contribution to empirical research lies in its collaborative activity and interconnectivity between participants. Kurlaender and Howell (2012) describe a focus group as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on a specific phenomenon from personal experience. This method leverages the group dynamic and capitalizes upon each participant's perspective, personal beliefs, lived experiences, and *real-time* reactions to aid discovery (Mogashoa, 2014). Another essential purpose of the focus group is to procure a multi-perspective view of the phenomenon of interest and examine the interactions between the researcher and participants and the participants amongst each other. This level of interaction would not be possible within the traditional one-on-one interview.

### **Data Collection Protocol**

The following procedures were utilized for the data collection process following the successful submission and approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application.

1. The researcher requested participation from students aged 25 and up who were enrolled in the *Dev-EdLift* program.

2. Distributed Informational Materials / Flyer
3. Distributed and Collected Participant Profile Questionnaire/s electronically
4. E-mailed all prospective study participants
5. Screened Participants
6. Sent Research Study Consent Forms
7. Received Confirmation of receipt of consent forms and documents
8. Selected interview time and date with participants
9. Confirmation of Interviews
10. Affirmed ethical consideration with the participants
11. Conducted interviews/focus group sessions, utilizing audio recording methods and note-taking protocols to assure research integrity and trustworthiness
12. Pre-, During-, and Post- Memo Updates
13. Created reflexive notes
14. Transcription of Notes from Webex recording (delvetool.com)
15. Member Checking / Participants reviewed the transcription for accuracy.
16. Data Synthesis (combining of interview transcriptions, memos, reflexive, and reflective notes)
17. Prep for analysis and coding (delvetool.com)
18. Secured Raw Data / Electronically Stored and Secured
19. 'Thank you protocol' was initiated and sent.

The data collection process during the administration of the interviews and focus group protocols is one that is paired with analytic notetaking. The raw data was used to substantiate the discussion and focus group transcription data during the coding process.

After each interview, the researcher took reflexive and reflective notes to recapitulate the experiences, review the conversations, and note each participant's contributions. Merriam (1998) asserts that reflections taken following an interview protocol include, but are not limited to, insights suggested by the interview, descriptive notes on the participants' verbal and nonverbal responses, and the researcher's parenthetical thoughts. This illustrative note-taking process was critical for the researcher's recollection of events and the accuracy of the information. Post-interview notes also served this purpose, allowing the researcher to reflect upon the discourse, closely examine the data collection process, and analyze the information.

### **Document Analysis**

Also crucial to this research study is document review or analysis. Bowen (2009) asserts that document analysis is an invaluable research method that strengthens triangulation and produces an evidentiary trail that may help to corroborate a study's research findings, increase reliability, and reduce insider bias. This qualitative research is beneficial when used in tandem with the interview and focus group protocols. The importance of document analysis cannot be overstated, as the researcher uses it to give voice, bring perspective, and provide a deeper understanding of the researched phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). For this study, we reviewed various documents, including course syllabi, program handbooks, attendance records, withdrawal documents, and an educational timeline. Bowen (2009) warns of the importance of evaluating documents with the knowledge that the data is not "necessarily precise, accurate, or complete recordings of events that have occurred" (p. 33). Nevertheless, the researcher must conceptualize and analyze the documents in hopes that they will provide a multi-

perspectival lens that will span time and space. O’Leary (2014) offers an eight-step process that the researcher will use while collecting, examining, and assessing the artifacts:

1. Gather relevant texts.
2. Develop an organization and management scheme.
3. Make copies of the originals for annotation.
4. Assess the authenticity of documents.
5. Explore the document’s agenda and biases.
6. Explore background information (e.g., tone, style, purpose).
7. Ask questions about the document (e.g., Who produced it? Why? When? Type of data?).
8. Explore content.

### **Data Analysis and Coding**

The formal data analysis and transcription process commenced following the execution of the data collection protocols. This process involved converting audio or video conversations into written text. Irvine and Kevan (2017) affirm that the transcription process involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules; Transcripts are not copies or representations of some actual reality; they are interpretative constructs that are useful tools for knowledge development. Merriam (1998) notes that the transcribed data can vary widely, from one word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon to several field notes describing a particular situation or incident.

Following the transcription process, the researcher examined the data for central themes related to Post-Traditionality, remediation, institutional barriers to completion, and a sense of belonging. Codes were then developed and organized into categories representing predominant themes discovered during the data collection. Merriam (1998) asserts that coding involves labeling the text based on the content of the study, and this process marks the beginning of theory development. Within this context, deductive, inductive, and in vivo or verbatim coding was utilized. Charmaz (2010) asserts that in vivo codes can be used as a tool that further "crystallizes and synthesizes meanings and may help to determine whether the researcher grasped the participant's intention. In vivo coding is the preferred method because it focalizes the voices and perspectives of the research participants. It is fitting that Post-Traditional Remedial Learners' voices and perspectives be centralized, as this demographic has been historically 'unheard.' A holistic and deductive analytic approach was used to form categories for this study. Rossman and Rallis (2003) purport that holistic strategies describe connections among the data within the actual context, whether an event, a place, or a person's experiences". Additionally, the deductive analysis allowed the researcher to develop categories based on the literature and the theoretical framework.

### **Research Data Processing**

Data processing is a crucial component of the research process as it transforms the data into a synthesized and useable form. Merriam (1998) posits that devising categories is the first step and is largely an intuitive process. It requires a systematic approach and is informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves. Recurring words, concepts, or

perspectives indicate which ideas should be extracted from the data. Further, the data processing component of this study will be divided into three sections. Phase I encompassed data collection, interim analyses, memoing, and data entry. Phase II incorporated the actual coding and sub-coding processes, and Phase III included the enumeration and categorization of codes. This process helped to streamline the data for the researcher's consumption and made the findings more easily discernible.

### **Trustworthiness**

All research must have a truth value, relevance, consistency, and neutrality to be considered valuable data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within this study, this truth value or trustworthiness was established through each of these means. The researcher's initial goal regarding 'trustworthiness' was to establish a positive working relationship with each participant founded upon trust, transparency, and respect. Establishing a foundation of trust undoubtedly improved the quality of the 'researcher/participant' interactions and, vicariously, the research findings.

Within this study, a high level of transparency and integrity was utilized; the participants were advised of all pertinent information in advance of the interview session, and a general openness to the inquiry was established. The participants retained their right to opt-out of the study at any time during the proceedings, granting the interviewees full control of their voice and participation. Each interview and focus group session was digitally recorded, allowing the researcher to chronicle the exchanges accurately. This established the integrity of the audit trail. Subsequently, the participants engaged in member checking, affirming that their thoughts were accurately captured and communicated by the researcher.

This study's credibility was also strengthened by triangulation. Patton (1999) asserts that triangulation denotes using multiple methods and data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. Using interview and focus group protocols and reviewing relevant documents captured a diverse range of lived experiences. Triangulation strengthened the transferability of findings, making them valuable points of consideration, if not generalizations, to other similar settings, situations, and populations.

The researcher's level of reflexivity was fundamental to the efficacy of the research study. Reflexivity helped the researcher to be cognizant of their positionality within the study's inner workings. It enabled them to understand how their interpretation of the phenomenon impacted their knowledge development process. Roulston (2010) describes reflexivity as the researcher's ability to introspectively refer to him or herself in proportion to creating knowledge about research topics. Reflexivity transcends "reflection" in examining one's relationship with others (Roulston, 2010).

A researcher's lived experience directly shapes how knowledge is heard, recorded, interpreted, and understood. Creswell and Poth (2018) affirm that the researcher's positionality influences all aspects of the research study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advise that the modern world is informed by power dynamics, often based on biases related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, and religion. For this cause, the researcher must be careful to employ reflexivity to ensure that they are not perpetuating oppressive structures within the research study or conducting the study in ways that may harm their participants (Attewell et al., 2006). During the interview/focus group process, the researcher also engaged in reflexivity by writing notes that captured her thoughts and focalized the participants' comments, ideas, and feelings during the

interview/focus group process. Writing memos is another beneficial reflexive/reflective practice. These processes were also embedded with the data analysis process.

To further strengthen trustworthiness within the study, the participants' reflections were transcribed by a third party; this process helped establish reliability. Avoiding researcher bias is of primary importance within the research process, especially when performing backyard research. Within this study, the researcher gathered data in the researcher's own 'backyard.' To mitigate issues surrounding insider bias and intuitive analysis, the researcher stated her positionality within the study's limitations section. Marcus (2000) warns of reaching "premature conclusions" (p. 19) because of one's familiarity or personal attachment to an interest, noting that the researcher must be intentional about identifying and managing their own biases. In this case, the researcher acknowledged her insider knowledge because of her role as an administrator at the college of study.

### **Researcher's Role**

The role of the researcher within a qualitative study differs from that of the role of the researcher in quantitative research. Qualitative data is collected explicitly by the human instrument rather than other means, including surveys, questionnaires, or reports (Sutton, 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher is the data collection instrument. Consumers of qualitative data must realize the challenges and advantages of research encompassed by the human element and the inevitable impact. The Role of the Researcher, as outlined by Glesne (2016), is to develop a refined self-awareness that will cause one to be cognizant of one's behavior and to anticipate the ramifications that can surface. Glesne (2016) also asserts that the researcher should

conduct research from a learner's vantage point, always paying close attention to each participant's voice and following the research procedures and findings circumspectly. Important also to the role of the researcher is their participation in the cyclical process of asking relevant questions, listening carefully to ascertain the meaning within each response, probing more deeply into what is being communicated, and listening more carefully to extract deeper levels of truth from the discourse.

In this study, the researcher ensured that all participants, both Post-Traditional Remedial students and college administrators, received structured information about the study's purpose and procedures. A universal design approach was utilized during this process, from forming the interview questions to making closed captioning options available during the Webex video conferencing meeting. All confusing jargon was avoided, and all information was provided in advance, allowing a 'pre-view' of the concepts reviewed within the study's confines. All participant data was anonymized to ensure that each participant's identity was impossible to detect. Participants' demographics were captured in Tables 3 and 4.

The researcher's positionality within this study was as an 'insider' to the campus community. In this regard, the researcher approached the interview and focus group process with prior knowledge regarding the topic and the institutional context in which it is situated. This was a source of some bias. Creswell (2009) purports that researchers must identify and be aware of their preferences, values, backgrounds, socio-economic status, history, and culture and consider how these factors may impact their interpretation of the collected data. The researcher mitigated this concern by avoiding tainting outcomes, posing leading questions, and coopting easily misinterpreted

language. In addition, the participants were assured of the study's confidentiality before beginning the interviews and focus group protocols. Astin (1999) purports that it is best for the 'insider' researcher to gather data with their "eyes open" and to approach the research with no assumption that they already know and understand the phenomenon being studied. It is possible that although the researcher might be part of the culture under study, they might not fully understand the subculture in all its complexities. This fact points to the need for researcher bracketing of assumptions. Tufford and Newman (2012) affirm bracketing within social science research as a method explicitly used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint or augment the research process.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

As the director of programming for a remedial program at the Clearview Community College's *DevEdLift*, the researcher was aware of many institutional issues and barriers that specifically impacted Post-Traditional Remedial students and was acquainted with administrators and executive-level leaders who were decision-makers in this regard. This type of association can give rise to bias. To mitigate these biases, the researcher employed Creswell's (2013) validation strategies, including "clarifying researchers' bias, triangulation, and member checking" (p. 203). The researcher conformed to the ethics of social research practices by conducting each interview independently of each other, informing interviewees, in advance, of their rights, not disclosing any information reported in the confines of the study, and not divulging the identity of any of the participants.

## **Ethics in Research Considerations**

This study was conducted according to the *Ethics in Research* principles established for protecting and caring for human subjects. These principles, guidelines, and practices, prescribe how researchers should comport themselves during the research process and advise what kinds of research should be conducted (Cohen et al., 2014). With these principles in mind, the researcher ensured that each participant was duly informed of their rights and potential risk to their person. In addition, the researcher developed materials that reflect a clear and concise path to voluntary consent (or dissent) without adverse repercussions. The researcher also ensured that the ethical procedures were culturally and contextually sensitive (Robinson-Pant & Singal, 2013).

## **Research and Confidentiality**

All collected data remained strictly confidential during each facet of the research opportunity: participant preparation, execution, data collection, and assessment. All participants were assigned a unique name and identification number used, in place of their legal names; this was used throughout the data analysis and reporting process. The highest level of discretion was utilized during the interview as the researcher outlined the confidentiality and anonymity practices that were the foundation for each participant's interaction.

## **Summary of Methodology**

This chapter explicated the methodology and principles of practice, the philosophical lens which determined the perspective, the research questions which focused the study's investigation, the research participants' background information that

contextualized the interview exchanges, the research protocols which shaped the study's boundaries, and the limitations which surfaced the inevitable constraints.

According to Phillips and Horowitz (2017), human beings must turn data into meaningful information that they can act upon. This study endeavored to do this by examining the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners, contributing to the empirical research, and seeking to effectuate institutional change by foregrounding their experiences. For the ensuing chapters, Chapter Four will examine the research findings. Chapter Five will expound upon those findings, offering suggestions for the enhanced support of PTRLs within community college settings.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This descriptive case study analysis proffers a review of the findings, first detailing the identified case, then the participant experiences as Post-Traditional Learners and the results collected through the noted data sources. The researcher approached this study from the lens of three guiding questions: (1) What are the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework (2) What motivates administrators, instructors, and advisors to work with and support Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework and (3) What are the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

### Case Context

The Dev-Ed*Lift* program of Clearview Community College (CCC) is the unit of analysis for this study, with Post-Traditional Remedial Learners comprising the student population under review. Established in 1957, CCC is a non-residential public community college, one of many institutions comprising a more extensive university system. With a population of approximately 7,265 students, this college is situated within an urban community and primarily serves students of color. Of the total student population, about 62% of students require a developmental intervention, and about 38% are 25 and older.

The Dev-Ed*Lift* program is a developmental education intervention that serves as a remedial option for students who are not academically college ready. After acceptance into the college, students may attend the program to reduce or overcome basic skills

insufficiencies in Math and English before matriculation. Students benefit from intensive academic support and college readiness preparation by deferring college matriculation for one semester and focusing on their pre-college development. This strategic scaffolding of academic and college preparatory supports prepares students for college-level coursework and to meet the college-mandated proficiency milestones that are indicative of ‘college readiness.’ Coupled with the academic coursework are college preparation seminars that focus on a plethora of topics, including but not limited to: The Growth Mindset, Communication & Time Management, Self-Advocacy & Campus Resources Academic Integrity, The Importance of Attending Class, and Wellness & Stress Management. These topics are juxtaposed with those which address questions concerning college majors and careers, financial aid, financial literacy, and transitioning to senior colleges for advanced degrees and certificates after attaining the Associate degree.

### **Description of Participants**

Within this study, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with 12 Post-Traditional Remedial Learners between the ages of 25 and 75. Enrolled in the Dev-Ed *Lift* program to satisfy their developmental needs in English, Math, or both, 11 of the 12 study participants completed their developmental education requirements, gaining proficiency within one semester. One student did not pass his developmental course; however, he reported that he would return to college in the next semester to retake his remedial content within the context of a corequisite course offered by the college. Three of the 12 students committed to a full-time academic program after completing their developmental intervention, delaying full-time employment to pursue and expedite earning their academic credentials. The remaining nine PTRLs committed to a part-time

educational program to provide additional time to balance home, family life, and financial and other personal obligations.

To further contextualize and validate the findings, a focus group interview was also conducted that explored the experiences of nine educational leaders who work with Post-Traditional Remedial Learners within the community college setting and to whom oversight has been entrusted. The focus group consisted of two executive-level leaders, three college administrators, two non-tenured faculty members, one academic department chairperson/ tenured faculty member, and one college advisor.

The overarching, predefined themes for the interviews and focus group protocols were: Educational History, Collegial Engagement, and Introduction to College. These themes were generated from premises developed in direct conversations between the researcher, PTRLs, and academic personnel. This process provided first-level coding, upon which all subthemes and codes were later developed. The one-on-one interview and focus group tables referenced in Chapter III provide preliminary data generated within the interview context. All respondents were identified using pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, and a mixture of actual and approximate age estimations was provided to add a visual reference for the participant descriptions.

## **Results**

The researcher synthesized the data from the 12 one-on-one interviews and one focus group into three overarching ideas, Educational History, College Engagement, and Introduction to College. Each theme has between two and five sub-themes from which the coding and analysis were derived.

**Table 5***Overarching Themes for One-on-One Interviews & Focus Group*

K - 12 Educational Experiences School and Self-Concept Justice & Trauma Prevention	Pre-College Influences	Educational History
Capabilities & Responsibilities Reimagined Student Population Mission, Norms, Values & SERVICE PTRLs & The Academy -Who Are PTRL?	Institutional Views of PTRLs	
Affective Emotions (i.e., Anxiety, Confidence, Determination, Elation, Fear, Grit, Intimidation)	PTRL Interpersonal Qualities	
Family Responsibilities (Duty & Sacrifice) Time Management Work & Financial Commitments Institutional Barriers	Barriers to Enrollment & Persistence	College Engagement
Intro to College Remediation Pros & Cons of Participation Perceptions & Preparation for College College Majors & Professional Aspiration	Remediation and the PTRL Experience	
Advisory & Instructional Support Campus Community Family Impact & Support Systems	PTRL Training & Support	
Access Skill Development Technology	College Readiness & Resources	
Finances & Career Advancement Reskill & Upskill Lifelong Learning	PTRL Motivation & Educational Migration	Introduction to College
Inspiration Personal Journey Sense of Belonging Teaching Purpose & Mission	Motivation for Participation	

**Theme #1: Educational History**

Educational history emerged as a broad data theme within the confines of the interview and focus group protocols and was codified into three subthemes to categorize further the perceived lived experiences of PTRLs in community college. Consequently, the sub-themes of Pre-College Influences, Institutional Views of PTRLs, and PTRL

Interpersonal Qualities were chosen. Within the context of the findings, it became evident that early educational experiences were deeply connected to the interpersonal qualities of PTRLs and intertwined with their self-concept and perceived institutional views. Six of the twelve participants (Aaron, Adelita, Senara, Shirley, Shyā, and Timothy) emphasized the profound connection between their formative educational experiences and those experienced during college enrollment and remediation. The students explained that challenges within the school setting related to lack of acceptance, poor self-esteem, low expectations, and unaddressed learning differences often resulted in self-loathing, anxiety, despair, and loss of inspiration. These emotional experiences impacted their fear of educational settings and their sense of self-concept.

#### ***Subtheme 1A: Pre-College Influences***

The experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners, as they engage in college, are deeply connected to their formative years. They provide insight into their educational approach and ability to engage with faculty, educational leaders, and other students within the community college setting. Shyā recounts that her formative school experiences were unbearable.

When I was a kid, 'school' was difficult. Growing up as a plus-sized girl... the bullying and everything kind of hindered me from school, you know. I loved learning. I loved to know things.... learning about stuff was fun, but I didn't like the people, I guess you could say. They were hurtful. They were distractions, and nobody did anything to help me. I lost my creativity... I lost my inspiration in school.

Shyā's revelatory reflection hints at how deeply moved she was by her pre-college educational experience. Its impact reverberates and directly parallels her emotional discomfit when she enrolled in her developmental education classes. Questions like, *"Will I be accepted? Will anyone make fun of me? and Can I do the work?"* plagued her mentally and emotionally. Eventually, through the continued coaching and support of her mentor and advisor, she moved from a place of discomfort and dis-ease to one of stability and assurance.

Document analysis served as an effective tool as we examined the relationship between her recollected experiences and their impact on her engagement in college. The advisor used a community-building, and self-awareness tool called an Educational Timeline (E.T.) within the context of the college seminar class. Each student was encouraged to document their educational experiences and visually depict the peaks and valleys of that experience. Its purpose was to chronicle the highs and lows of each student's academic, social, and experiential journey in school and to draw inferences that would reveal not only past experiences but also guide present beliefs and impact future practices. In the case of Shyā, her E.T. provided attestation of prolonged periods of 'downness' with annotated evidentiary notes to accompany her visual depiction. This further verified the tremendous challenge she experienced in her formative educational years and how its impact still resonates in her collegial experience.

The diversity of the PTRL students was further apparent as Timothy shared a different kind of school experience that also impacted his self-concept, success outcomes and college experience. He recounts:

Back when I was in elementary school, I always felt like I was not the sharpest tool in the shed, if you know what I mean. The teachers were okay but did not go out of their way to help explain things to me, and when they did, it was always a big deal. They made you feel slow....kids were always laughing at me. You know how that can be.

Timothy, at the age of 75, still recounts this experience dolefully. His inability to connect academically during his formative years still stands in his mind as a formidable barrier to success in college, though decades later. In hindsight, he understands why his disability was unchecked and unaddressed. He shared, “*They probably just didn’t have the know-how back then.*” Neither Timothy nor his parents possessed the technical language to explain his lived experience and his dire need for evaluation, assessment, and support. Instead, his ‘not knowing’ was considered misbehavior, and not being on task, the possibility of an undiagnosed learning disability was not presented.

Exploring how to support students with learning differences remains a dire need in higher education and requires further exploration, research, and development. It is essential to acknowledge that adult learners who attend college may not have had the benefit of early academic support and may not have addressed their unique learning needs. Eventually, Timothy stopped trying to learn in school and was considered a behavior problem; he was in third grade. He said:

I did not know it then, but I was crying out for help and needed someone to hold my hand, befriend me, and be sure that I was not left out; I was an outcast from the beginning. My parents were good people but did not know how to help me either. They just told me to be good in school, or I was gonna get a whupping.

In adulthood, students enroll in college, bearing some unresolved issues from their youth. Higher education institutions must find strategic ways to manage support for this population beyond providing additional time for exam taking or referring students to be evaluated.

The Pre-College Influences in this research also included home, family, and community. Adelita's experiences in school were vastly different in that she loved school but had challenges at home, which were directly related to her lack of basic needs. She lived with her parents, brother, two younger sisters, and grandmother, but she remembers having other problems that impacted her ability to learn in school. She said, *"Food was always on the table, and 'My Abuela' was always at home, but being poor meant that you never really had all you needed."* She remembers not having appropriate clothing for the different seasons and not having money for snacks or trips. She also rarely saw her parents during the week because they were always working. Poverty was a perennial issue in her household. Her parents worked long hours but often could not keep the utilities on. She also suffered as a bed wetter until high school. She remembers always being so ashamed and embarrassed about herself. She recounts:

The kids would say all kinds of mean things to me.....call me all kinds of names. I acted like I didn't care, but I did.... I was afraid. I was scared all the time. Even though I was smart and liked school, it was hard to get past all the other things I was going through, and not having someone to talk to really hurt me. I mean, it was many things that I was going through mentally. I was going through body dysmorphia. I was going through anxiety, social anxiety. I never got help for it when I was in school. And I got pregnant at a young age.

For Adelita, her challenges depicted the impact of poverty, low self-concept, and the effects of unmet basic needs. For Adelita, Shyā, and Timothy, the school setting was a challenging place to learn and develop one's self-concept. They each expressed varying levels of mental and emotional distress, which impacted their ability to fit in, be emotionally healthy, and thrive academically.

The diversity of the student experience was further made manifest as we interviewed Adam and Shirley. They had very different school experiences, yet they were equally revelatory. Adam depicts his experience as one in which he was disinterested from very early in his schooling experience.

I kinda liked school in elementary and maybe junior high school. Yeah...but after that, things changed. Yes, I really did not like school too much. And in high school, forget it! I ended up having a child, so I dropped out of high school. I did not... I mean, I didn't really care for school at that time anyway. You know, I was one of those students who were more into hanging out and thinking, what do I need school for, and what are they gonna teach me that I need in the future? I thought I just needed to work and keep it moving.

Shirley, too shared that her high school experiences were not particularly remarkable. She had the educational acumen to be an excellent student and was very friendly and popular with her peers; however, her education was not a priority. She recounts:

Being young and just crazy... you wanna do what you wanna do. You know.... influences. And then I got pregnant in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and that was in the nineties. It changed everything.... And back then, when you got a baby, you couldn't be in

school like that.... You couldn't be in school pregnant back then- it was one or the other. So, I left school, but I felt bad.... I always wanted to go back.

For Adam and Shirley, formal education was not a priority during their pre-college years; however, the impact of becoming parents in high school and, reportedly, the passage of time altered their view of education, life, and their need for academic advancement. The lingering effects of K-12 experiences, both academically, socially, and experientially are consequential for future experiences in school. They provide practical knowledge that students and service providers can use to strategize regarding PTRL support.

***Subtheme 1B: Institutional View of PTRLs***

The experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners are deeply impacted by the institutional viewpoint, barriers to participation, and administrative personnel's care practices. Each of the nine focus group participants noted that the community college must begin understanding who the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner is, their needs, their patterns, and how best to serve them. Some suggestions for institutional improvement were offered, including but not limited to conducting research, executing surveys, and making data-driven decision-making a priority. Dr. Greene, Ms. Owens, Ms. Bach, Ms. Pardo, and Ms. Ferguson highlighted the importance of meeting students where they are. Ms. Ferguson affirmed; The Post-Traditional Learner's experiences are varied:

It is not a one cap fits all approach, and we cannot assume that we know all about them. We have to do our homework and ensure we're well-informed about these students. Make sure that we are reading the relevant articles, research, and studies around this to give them what they need.

Each focus group participant acknowledged the importance of research, not proceeding with anecdotal evidence and observations alone but by collaborating with other educational service providers, faculty members, and leaders and creating forums where further discovery can occur. Three focus group members (Mr. Luis, Ms. Pardo, and Ms. Vala ) warned of developing deficit thinking which highlights specific student demographics as having internal, situational, or motivational deficiencies which make failure more likely or inevitable. They relayed that these are grave but common errors in higher education that may cause students to feel a sense of disillusionment, disconnection, and alienation.

This sentiment was familiar to Ms. Pardo, who shared her experience discussing a student circumstance with a college faculty member. She said:

I called one of the professors about a student, and he said, Elondra, you want me to change a lifetime in 3 months. He told me after taking one look at the student, *'He is going to be a solid failure!'* Given all his circumstances, how poor he was, how he had an ankle bracelet.... walking around being monitored by the police. He didn't see any chances for him, and that is part of a larger problem that educators and institutions have. If you see a failure, when students come through the door, they have already failed because we don't have any expectations for them.

The focus group members recognized the importance of acknowledging the reality of the student's circumstances without relegating them to a position of hopelessness.

Department Chairperson Dr. Ulm has committed her life's work to creating an environment where students can develop and thrive. She stated:

I have a different experience. In working with Post-Traditional Students over a 15-year teaching career, I would say many of the Post-Traditional Students I've encountered have been among the finest students I have ever had. They are also a resource for, you know, some of our younger traditional students who are coming right out of high school. Post-Traditional Learners are students who often have incredible strengths compared to their struggles. You know that is also good to recognize. I think.

Several focus group members acknowledged the seriousness with which many Post-Traditional Remedial Learners approach the teaching moment but the need to be recognized as capable and resilient. Ms. Vala noted:

I feel like adult learners come with genius. Genius right? They come with wisdom and experiences; college is just a place to cultivate and recognize their unique genius. I think that Post-Traditional students come with a wealth of knowledge. Sometimes they believe they were not being educated because of the timeline in which they were not in school. So, we are moving to a revision and mapping of how they recognize their genius and how we shift our thinking around that. Furthermore, how do I create a space for the new reality? I think of it as a narrative space to dream.

The institutional view of PTRLs and the academic personnel who serve them often view students based on the milieu from which they come, their speech patterns or their physical appearances; instead, their genius, ability, and vast array of real-world experiences must be acknowledged and appreciated. The 'adulting' resources students bring to a college are extensive; we should encourage them further to get those resources

and abilities into the classroom to enhance their learning, collaboration, and skill development. The focus group members attested that adult learners often drop all their knowledge on the proverbial steps and enter as disadvantaged students when they are advantaged in many critical ways. Ms. Owens offers:

So, you take the mom who has been out of school for 25 years and ask her what 20% off \$499 is; she could do that in her head because she's already been thinking about this and making those types of connections. However, she would not recognize it when the same question is asked in a math class. She does not know how to make the connection, and I don't think we do a good job helping them, either.

The participants agreed that the community college must do a better job of seeing and serving students. If students' sense that their prior learning is relevant and will be used, they will be more likely to be excited about earning a credential and may feel motivated and empowered to complete it. Ms. Ferguson remarks,

The idea of metacognition comes into play and connecting students to their prior knowledge are necessary. When we don't help students connect and feel a part, it makes them feel as though they are not valued. And why would they stay if they are not valued and don't feel connected to the learning experience?

Students in the vulnerable space of needing developmental interventions often bear an even more weighty burden because they enroll in college believing they are missing the fundamental ingredients necessary for success. It is an ongoing challenge to relay their capabilities, connect them to the metacognition process and help them to think their way to deeper levels of cognition and success. For Ms. Bach,

Our understanding...our view of our students must change. For somebody who has been out of school for a couple of years.....somebody whose life has begun in some way, whether through a job or a family or anything..... the return to school is a very conscious decision. It is not just a continuation of high school; that effort must be honored and celebrated.

Engaging in higher education is daunting for many students because they face innumerable situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to their dreams. The focus group members affirmed that as educators seeking to serve the adult learner, they must use their full range of knowledge, experiences, and resources to meet the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner where they are and help them to reach their goals. Ms. Pardo summarized by saying:

We need to graduate these students from college and get them to be leaders. We need them to be able to help us help them. They are experts at their problems, right? They are experts in their own reality. So, they also are experts in the solution. We need more opportunities for students to give us ideas or to have a seat at the table. They must be developed to be vested in the process and their own success.

Institutions aim not to enroll, remediate, and engage students alone, but to graduate them and help them advance in their educational aspirations, vocational callings, or business pursuits.

### ***Subtheme 1C: PTRL Interpersonal Qualities***

The experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners, as they engage in college, are deeply connected to their interpersonal qualities and commitments. As previously

mentioned, a range of behavioral and emotional disturbances begin in childhood, and one's affect refers to the feelings and emotions that one experiences. Zajonc (2000) purports that one's affect plays a vital role in how one reacts to the stimuli in the world. Important to note that *affect* signals an instinctual reaction to stimuli before a typical cognitive process starts. Affective responses can occur without extensive perceptual and cognitive encoding and can be made sooner and with greater confidence than cognitive judgments (Zajonc, 2000).

### **Negative Affects**

Most of the Post-Traditional Learners cited having negative emotions plague their experience while enrolling in college and adapting to their remedial course. Negative affect refers to a subjective experience or a group of negative emotional states such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, stress, sadness, worry, guilt, shame, anger, and envy. Our PTRLs cited these negative emotions as the most significant deterrents to enrollment and persistence in college. Students reported feeling these emotions as they logged on to their online classes or entered the collegial space. Shyā reported:

I cannot stop hating myself or stop being ashamed .....I just want to feel worthy.....just want to be a part. I feel like if everybody gets along and talks to each other, then we all win... we're all winners. In high school, I felt like such a loser.... but not now.

This exemplifies how negative affective emotions can impact self-concept and the ability to relate with others. This state of mind can also impact persistence.

Another powerful emotion that was common among the participants was guilt. It was noted by 8 of the 12 respondents. Pilar mentioned:

Whenever I have free time, I try to do something with my kids that they'll like, you know, that they'll really like..... I could not do anything while in school because that was the same time as their summer vacation. So, I couldn't give them a good summer and do a lot of nice things like I usually do. I feel guilty that they didn't have so much fun because of me. I was doing my schoolwork; I have to deal with that.

Many Post-Traditional Learners, who are also parents, struggle with the reality of the time adjustments that must be made and how it impacts their families.

Negative emotions rooted in one's Sense of Belonging have also emerged as one of the most crippling impacts of the PTRL experience. Adelita reflected:

I think having someone to talk to is a big part of having a real college experience. I spent so much time in high school feeling alone and like I was *'just there.'* No one wanted me to be a part. I didn't have nice clothes and wasn't popular, but now that doesn't matter so much. I feel like I belong because my advisor helps me, and my instructor is there to help me too. I expected to be alone.

Shirley also expressed the importance of having a sense of belonging as an adult learner. She said:

Going to school as a grown-up can get overwhelming, but when you have a group of people doing the same thing and y'all are helping each other....It makes you feel a little more relaxed and at ease... and that's pretty important. For all students, but mainly adult learners, when you come back to school, sometimes you already think, "Oh, I'm so late in doing this. I should have done this already,

and you get down on yourself. If you are a part of the community, you know you are not alone.

Belonging and camaraderie with other learners were vital for some of the PTRLs. Having someone to talk to through the challenges and who shares a mutuality of experience with you allows you to have a safe space to process issues, tackle challenges, and plan strategically.

### **Positive Affects**

Also common to the Post-Traditional experience is a sense of joy, inspiration, motivation, and pride at the prospect of college enrollment. Most PTRL interviewees expressed that college enrollment was a lifelong dream that spanned many generations. For some, it bore cultural significance, while for others, it was deeply personal. During the interview process, the PTRLs were explicitly asked about their 'Why.' Some students were elated to have a second chance at making a better life for themselves and their families. In contrast, others saw their enrollment as an opportunity to strengthen their family legacy. Still, others saw enrollment in college as a way to set a good example for their children, while others made promises to parents and family members who have since passed away, but the impact of their promise remains. Overwhelmingly, the PTRLs saw enrollment in college as the realization of a vision shared with their biological families and communities. For others, it was the simple delight of being able to help their children with their homework and emerge as someone who is accomplished and capable. Hibo reflected:

It makes me feel good that my kids are proud that I am back in school. They feel good because I'm helping them with their homework. Usually, if they came to a

Math or English part in the homework, the daddy had to be there to help because I could not help them. But when I went back to school, I was helping a lot with the homework because, you know, I was doing better then. So, during this vacation, they had a lot of math things to do. So, I did help them a lot. So, the daddy didn't need to be here. So, they were like, oh, mommy, you know, now you're doing good. You are doing good. I think they feel happy, and that makes my heart glad.

Student Success and well-being are intrinsically connected to the interpersonal qualities of The Learner. Each emotional expression, negative or positive, is common to the human experience and must be leveraged, balanced, and negotiated to help students effectively transition from, to, and through the community college setting. The PTRLs overcame their negative emotions and persisted through their remedial coursework by focusing on their purpose and why they enrolled in college. The ability to focus on that purpose has proven to be an ally in developing relationships, a sense of belonging within the campus community, and the persistence required to matriculate and graduate.

### **Theme #2: College Engagement**

The second overarching theme that emerged during the data analysis was understanding the barriers to enrollment and persistence for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. For structural purposes, this section is branched into four subsections that reflect significant impasses to the enrollment and integration of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners: a). barriers to enrollment and persistence, b). remediation and the PTRL experience, c). PTRL training and support, and d). college readiness and resources.

### ***Subtheme 2A: Barriers to Enrollment and Persistence***

The one-on-one interview participants highlighted many of the struggles they face as Post-Traditional Remedial Learners who have enrolled in college. A profusion of dispositional, situational, and institutional barriers significantly impacts their ability to enroll in college, have a sense of belonging within the college community, and persist to graduation. Reportedly, some situational obstacles that are experienced include financial depravity or living below the poverty line, substandard and overcrowded living conditions, poor living wages with very little room for career advancement, mental health and wellness challenges, below-par schools and childcare issues, family challenges, and a general sense of dis-ease. The female participants noted childcare as one of their persistence barriers. Hoffman (2000) affirms that childcare can be one of the most significant barriers to women's participation in adult education. Yolanda remarks:

Not being there for my child impacts me deeply, but I have to work! I cannot be with her. I don't have the luxury of staying home.... or being there when she gets home from school....I cannot do that. Can't! So, I am not that mom that's on top of her. Do you know what I'm saying? I can't... I don't have that luxury.

The struggle between prioritizing family, work, and financial obligations can affect the PTRL's educational aspirations. As reported by Jabari, "*Not being able to take care of your family properly tears you up inside.*" This sobering reality can shape educational connections, progress, and persistence. This barrier may cause a student to be unable to concentrate in school or, more may cause them to stop attending classes.

Barriers related to one's emotions or disposition are also essential to consider as impactful for the Post-Traditional experience. Dispositional barriers are potent because

they include the power of the mind and the continual processing of past experiences, perceptions, failures, and regrets. This can form an onerous barrier that impacts one's ability to break unhealthy cycles of thought and deed. Past occurrences and influences may alter the trajectories of full participation in college, as exemplified by the interviewees who experienced adverse childhood experiences in school. Participation in adult education can vary according to the effects of past experiences, namely, the influence of family and education experiences as children and youth. Having a troubled or unsuccessful pre-college educational background, in addition to negative thinking concerning the possibility of success in higher education, is known to derail student advancement and success.

Institutional barriers to persistence can also have a cooling impact on the intentions of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners to continue attending their remedial classes. As noted by several interviewees and focus group participants, institutional obstacles in the form of poorly allocated campus resources, closed or unavailable student services, limited assessments for students with learning differences, lack of trained staff, logistical structures that favor more traditional students', rigid academic calendars, and policies and practices that limit experiential learning credit, incremental credentialing, and other more innovative course designs, may have an impact on students morale and retention. Other institutional barriers include the lack of adult-centered campus programming, ineffective teachers, poor curricular selections and unavailable evening and online classes. These factors may discourage some adult learners from course completion (Bamber & Tett, 2000). These institutional barriers are deterrents to full

participation and when coupled with students' situational and dispositional barriers, often squelch their energy, motivation, and opportunity.

***Subtheme 2B: Remediation and the PTRL Experience***

The experience of enrolling in college is unique for each student. Some Post-Traditional Remedial Learners are returning to college after other unsuccessful attempts, while others enroll essentially as first-time freshmen. Emanuel shared that as a 60-year-old adult learner who was last in a college classroom over 35 years ago, he knew he needed a refresher. He said, *“It fits into this old adage, If you don't use it, you lose it...it's as simple as that!”* Further, he said regarding math remediation, *“You must reacquaint yourself with learning college math; It is very different from the math you use in real life.”* Similarly, Senara was eager to take the remedial math course because, in her unique educational experience, she never took math in high school. She reflected:

When I was back home in South Africa, I felt empty. I felt like half of the world knows math- high school math, and I did not know it. There was a void that I needed to fill. I felt like I needed to study, learn, and grow. Education is the key that opens all the doors.... every door. It will help you to be confident when you introduce yourself.... speak and be articulate. You cannot do that without education. Education is the way. But it is hard for me because, in South Africa, both my parents were not educated. My dad is from Mozambique. That is next... like next door to South Africa, but my mom... She grew up in the era of apartheid. So, the black people, in some cases, were not allowed to go to school, and when they could, It was expensive. Yeah. So, my parents did not go to school. My mom is... I think she's 58. She's young, but she's not educated.

Each student within this small sample had a dramatically different lived experience, but a common cord drawn through each experience was their willingness to pursue the completion of the developmental course and to gain proficiency under the glaring sun of circumstances, barriers, and challenges. Each participant showed enormous courage as they completed their developmental class, though one unsuccessfully. The attempt was made, knowledge was gained, and the goal of college enrollment was achieved.

### ***Subtheme 2C: PTRL Training & College Support Systems***

The topic of College Support Systems provided a transitional space in each interview session to move from concepts related to the student's readiness and responsibilities to their unique needs as Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. Six of the 12 students, Hibo, Shirley, Jabari, Reneē, Senara, and Pilar, cited childcare as one of their most formidable barriers to persistence and the area where support was most needed. It was noted that early childhood care impacted their ability not only to attend class and engage with peers, advisors, and professors but also restricted their ability to attend tutoring and other learning opportunities earmarked for remedial learners (i.e., grammar labs, one-on-one advisory sessions, etc.). Having childcare services on campus alleviated a great deal of stress. Jabari said, *“After you attend in-person classes, you can pick up your child and know they are close by and are being cared for on the same campus where you are becoming educated.”* Senara affirmed,

If you have young children, you can take them to campus with you....I cannot say I have an excuse because I have a 4-year-old....so I cannot attend college. No, there is help! There are resources! You can take your kid if they are between the

age of 2 and 12 and pay nothing to have real educators care for them. The level of support...It's surprising.

The adult students' appreciation for and pursuit of resources to alleviate the strain of their personal lives is another factor consequential to their success. The advisory team of the *Dev-EdLift* program plays a pivotal role in that process as they disseminate information, connect students to resources, and orient and transition them to their next step after remediation. Each student expressed the benefit of the *Dev-EdLift* program's intrusive advising approach, which partners with each student throughout their remedial semester, providing one-on-one advisement support, small and whole group sessions, workshops, and pre-college preparation. Emanuel stated, *"The shelf life of our skills is so short now; everything is evolving." The knowledge you get today will probably be outdated by this afternoon, so you need somebody to help you through that process.*"

Adam stated,

My advisor tries to tap into your personal life a little bit. Not digging too deep, but just enough to understand who you are, your mindset, what you are doing, where you're going, and why. I think it's very good. It makes you feel kind of 'homey' like someone cares. She just would not let me give up. She would email me, call me, and say, What is going on with you? What do you wanna do? I appreciate that because you don't get that kind of personal attention everywhere.

PTRLs also expressed the importance of teacher engagement and one-on-one academic support. Shirley reflected, *"Sometimes, being older, you just don't know what you don't know, and you don't get things right away. Having someone to help you without making*

*you feel stupid is a plus.*” The instructional support, coupled with that of the advisors, reportedly was a sustaining presence within the Dev-Ed*Lift* program. Shyā reflected,

The instructors of the Dev-Ed *Lift* program make themselves available to you for one-on-one tutoring or to talk about where you are in your coursework. They have something called conferences which is so helpful. You don’t have to wait until the end of the semester to see where you are. Sometimes you can only hear the voice in your own head, but that’s not enough. You need to open up and talk with someone about what you’re thinking and how to get there. We, adults, need that too.

Seven of the 12 interviewees, Aaron, Hibo, Jabari, Pilar, Reneē, Shirley, and Yolanda, expressed the importance of campus support and climate from a more conceptual perspective. That is because they had limited experience attending classes on the brick-and-mortar campus, as their classes were held virtually. This factor introduces an exciting dynamic to college support. The virtual campus climate has now emerged as an essential new consideration as we examine students’ engagement and sense of belonging. Nine interviewees, Aaron, Adelita, Hibo, Jabari, Reneē, Senara, Shirley, Shyā, and Timothy, asserted that a sense of community was vital for them as adult learners and could be achieved virtually. At the same time, 3 PTRLs, Emanuel, Pilar, and Yolanda, believed that the campus culture and ‘belonging’ wasn’t as consequential for them. In contrast, Shirley shared:

School can get pretty lonely and overwhelming when you have to do it alone.

When you have a group of people doing the same thing, and y’all are helping each other, It makes you feel a little more relaxed and at ease, which is important for us

adults. For all students, but mainly adult learners, it's like they forgot all about us grown folks and that we have needs too. Just give us your money and make it the best way you can; that's what it feels like! When you're returning to school, sometimes you are thinking negatively, like, " Oh, I'm late doing this. You, like.... come with all this baggage, so to speak. Yeah. Cause, like me with my age, that's my thing. It's like, okay. How am I gonna get through this if nobody shows me the ropes?"

Several participants shared their sentiments regarding the importance of having a sense of community on campus, whether virtual or traditional brick and mortar. Several participants expressed their views on how the college perceives them. They noted that they feel invisible to some degree and may be avoided because the college does not have an answer to their needs. Several students expressed their need to feel valued and a part of the college. Adam remarked, "*What we really need is people to care enough to stop their day, to talk to us and, give us directions... tell me I'm on the right track, and I'll take it from there. This would make me feel welcome, and like, 'yes,' this can be done!*" Jabari shared:

"At any stage of life, whether you are a teenager in school or 50, 40, 30, or in your late twenties, you still need companions to talk about academics and the experiences you have in common. Knowing that your peers who are closer to your age are achieving their goals motivates you to know that, Yes, you can do it too. So, the campuses' environment is critical."

Emanuel shared:

“Adult learners need more than talk. We need more than a few evening classes. We need to see ourselves on the billboards, provide more services that fit our lifestyles and make the classrooms feel like we are not invisible.”

In contrast, Yolanda’s reflections on feeling like she belongs in college are more directly connected to her unique experiences. She said:

I’m a survivor. I survived violence...I survived domestic abuse. I don’t need to belong; I need to get what I need to get -and get on with my life. My ex destroyed so much of me. I don’t give power to anyone to change my emotions. He tried to kill me. I don't know why I stayed so long. I stayed for ten years. He disfigured my face. You can’t see it now, but when you see me in person, he broke my nose... He broke my septum. My septum is broken. I'm full of scars from being in that relationship for so long, and he disfigured my face. He broke my finger. He burned me with cigarettes. I have scars everywhere. So, that relationship was a disaster. But, coming through that, I decided for myself... I'm like, I have to do this for myself. I don’t care who accepts me, likes me, or cares. This is my time. If I don't do it now, I will never do it. I don’t care about all of that belonging stuff. I just want to make it happen for my family and me. I am worth it to make this happen! When you go through enough in life, you feel like nothing... I will walk through fire to change my life, my children's lives, and my grandbaby, who is getting ready to come into the world. I want people to be cordial, but that’s it.

Each of these reflections represents the lived experiences of the PTRL students and should lead the institutional decision-making regarding student engagement, student follow-up, representation, and general student care.

### ***Subtheme 2D: Adult-Centered Campus Resources***

Through this study, the researcher and participants discussed the impact of access to campus resources on student enrollment, retention, and persistence in college. Identifying campus resources explicitly designed with the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner in mind was acknowledged as an essential aspect of student belonging. Shyā stated. *“If you come to campus after 5 pm, every office and window is usually closed. You can’t get anything done; it’s not the most welcoming feeling. Even something as simple as having food options would make a difference.”* This unavailability of goods and services indicates the institution's lack of awareness or preparation. Nine of the 12 interviewees, Aaron, Adelita, Hibo, Jabari, Pilar, Reneē, Senara, Shirley, and Shyā, expressed that having available campus resources increases their sense of value within the community. This sense of worth is actualized through appropriating and allocating human, material, and financial resources, which will actively and fully address the complex needs of the PTRLs within the campus community.

Several of the Post-Traditional interviewees, Adelita, Hibo, Pilar, Reneē, Senara, Shirley, and Timothy, expressed that campus resources such as tutoring services, the food pantry, disabilities services, counseling services, early childhood center, training labs, and the loaner laptop program have helped them to persist in the Dev-Ed *Lift* program during their very first semester. Shirley remarked:

My kids messed up my laptop while doing school at home, so I planned to attend my ZOOM classes using my cell phone. I didn’t know any better, but my advisor said, oh no, that’s going to be hard to do with math, so she helped me get a laptop, and I can keep it as long as I am attending classes too.”

The provision of a laptop by the campus IT department was transformational for Shirley. She expressed feeling very happy and relieved that she could attend online classes and that the college would trust her to use the tech device for as long as she was attending classes. She reportedly could not afford to purchase one at that time. Other students like Adam prefer an in-person, more pen-and-pencil approach to education. He recounted:

I was the only student who went to the library and printed out every document the teacher sent us. People were like, “You’re doing too much. Just look at it online!” Well.... maybe that’s good for them, but I’m old school. I can’t do these calculations and stuff on the computer. It is too confusing and scary. I don’t know anything about that. But loose-leaf paper..... I can tell you about loose-leaf paper.

The Dev-Ed *Lift* program's emphasis on providing services that meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of the diverse range of Post-Traditional Remedial learners is vital. Although the needs look different for each student, some resources consistently model the necessary skills for long-term college success. Coupled with the support of college advisors who are trained to support them, the students develop new skills and activate skills they already possess, to navigate the barriers and systems inherent to every institution. Shirley recounts:

Going back to school is a trip. You have so many things to manage, and your mind is all over the place. I have six kids, so I can never really rest and focus on myself anyway....I’m constantly worrying that I’m not there or that one of them needs me. If the college can give us a toolkit or something on how to get through this thing, it would help. There’s a lot to do and a lot to know. I had to learn how to write again! I mean, I work security and write all the time, but that’s different

cause when you're doing it for work, you have a format that you already know. Yeah, so I had to get out of my comfort zone, talk to the tutor, connect with the academic resource center, and learn to take notes again. Plus, it's harder to remember when you're older... The first week was crazy... a big adjustment. But my advisor helped me out a lot.

Several participants remarked that the online option was a transformational opportunity within their college experience. Hibo recounted how grateful she was to have a virtual option for school but that attending classes online was more difficult than she thought it would be. She said:

When I started, I had no idea how to use a computer; I had to learn. But in the beginning, everybody knew much more than me. But I can say the online class helped me a lot because I'm a mom of four kids, and when I started back to school, I had a newborn baby, so going back to campus... I don't think I could do it. I had no daycare, and they would not take a two-month-old baby anyway. In my first semester, I was six months pregnant. I had the baby in the second semester, and in the third semester, he was still the baby. Without the online modality, I would have had to wait a year and a half to go to school. It was still hard because he was always crying while I was in my online class, and I had to hold him the whole time to get some peace while I was learning 'the math.'

The extraordinary effort made by the interviewees to embrace their studies was evident through the review of attendance documents. The attendance and student accountability records indicated that the students regularly attended classes, completed homework, made up assignments, and communicated with their advisors and instructors while facing

extraordinary circumstances. One of our participants, mother passed away during the semester. Through that traumatic experience, she maintained communication, arranged to make up assignments with her instructor, and ended the semester academically proficiently. The adult learners' ability to bring their adulting skills from real life into the educational sphere is an asset that will serve them well throughout their collegial experience.

### **Theme #3: Introduction to College Remediation**

After enrolling in college, the first step for many students is to learn about their need to participate in developmental interventions, whether through a remedial program or a corequisite course designed to combine instructional material that should have been retained in high school with first-year gateway courses. Of the 12 remedial learners interviewed, five students, Jabari, Pilar, Shirley, Shyā, and Yolanda, were deeply disappointed when they learned of their need to complete developmental education classes before beginning their matriculated classes. Yolanda remarked:

I was disappointed in myself. I thought I was better than that! Very disappointed because I'm like, I cannot believe that I am 49 years old, and I still haven't gotten it (Math) yet. At this age.... I was so disappointed in myself.

Jabari reported having a similar reaction. He remarked:

I thought this was another time-consuming delay I did not anticipate. I've lost so much already....I don't have all the time in the world to become a nurse. I thought I would apply, be accepted, and start taking college courses, but it didn't work out that way.

Jabari later shared that after starting the classes, he realized that taking a preparatory course was what he needed to bring him up to speed academically. He remarked that the colleges should also provide remediation in other subjects related to their professional aspirations. This would prepare the students for their credited classes. He said, *“I would probably advise anybody needing remedial coursework to just go with the process.”*

The seven remaining students, Adam, Adelita, Emanuel, Hibo, Senara, Shirley, and Timothy, felt more resigned to participating in developmental education coursework. However, their responses were exhibited through a range of reactions. Some were fully aware of the impact of the disuse of their academic knowledge over time and viewed taking remedial coursework as necessary; they welcomed the intervention. While others adapted more slowly to their curative reality, ultimately understanding their need to sharpen their skills over the course of the developmental semester. Adam initially felt discouraged when he was advised of the need to take remedial coursework; however, he decided to take the class and follow the recommendations of the college. He remarked, *“I want to see all I missed when I was younger.”* Adam eventually became the biggest proponent of developmental classes, citing the *college knowledge* gained, study practices learned, and online tutoring support were all things he learned to access through the developmental experience. In his words, *“It was more than just the remedial class. It was the structure that was my key to success.”* During the third quarter of the class, Adam had an accident and could not walk. Nevertheless, he remained committed to his online classes, accessed the resources digitally, and completed the course successfully.

### ***Subtheme 3A: Preparation for College***

The college readiness and preparation process for each interviewee varied considerably. While all interviewees participated in the same developmental education intervention, their experiences, needs, and perceptions were influenced by a myriad of factors, including but not limited to students' early lived experiences, available support communities, early exposure to education, and positive experiences within educational settings. Five of the 12 interviewees, Aaron, Emanuel, Pilar, Senara, and Shirley, shared that they began thinking about college later in life, while other participants had dreams of attending college from childhood. Hibo and Yolanda indicated that unforeseen challenges interrupted their childhood desire to attend college directly after high school; however, decades later, they returned to their dream and are making it a reality. Hibo stated:

First of all, I'm gonna say I've loved school all my life. Like school was everything to me. As a child, I was always at the head of my class, and I knew very early that I wanted to go to college. But everything changed when I got married and moved to this country. I didn't know anyone and didn't have enough information to help me return to school, but I always wanted to return to school because I knew I needed to be there.

This early desire to attend college is often cultivated within the context of the family, their values, thoughts about the importance of education, and their access to resources.

Yolanda also dreamed of attending college and becoming a physician, "*perhaps a pediatrician,*" she mused, but life's circumstances thwarted those dreams. She explained:

I have always wanted to become a doctor. That was my dream from day one; that was my heart. I have loved the medical field since I was a child. I loved watching

the doctors on tv. I just loved school and was always a good student, but unfortunately, I met a man, and I had my first son at a very young age, and that was it! My dreams of medical school were over just like that. And then shortly after, I had my daughter.... so that is two children. I was unwed, and soon after, that relationship went sour. So, I had to go back to my mother's house with my tail between my legs... and with two children, yeah... two children back at my mother's house. So that was a done deal. I had to work. My mother was like; you're not going to come in here with two kids to sleep all day, honey; you have got to work or go to school; you gotta do one or the other. So, I was like, you know what, I need money for these babies...I'm gonna work. So, guess where I had to work with no education.... in a factory.

Yolanda and Hibo shared the conundrum of having positive school experiences in childhood but later having disruptive life events to waylay academic re-engagement, enrollment, and dream activation. The experience of having a disruptive force delay academic progression was common among the participants.

### ***Subtheme 3B: College Majors and Professional Aspirations***

Of the 12 PTRLs interviewed, ten (Aaron, Adelita, Hibo, Jabari, Pilar, Reneē, Senara, Shirley Shyā, and Yolanda) have enrolled in their credited courses with the collective goals of earning a college credential, advancing their careers, increasing their annual income, and changing the financial trajectories of their families. Jabari stated:

I have seen the difference between those who have a good education and those who do not. Having that higher level of education gives you access to so many good things. The benefits that a college education brings to your life... the

changes are significant for you... and great for your family. I will use nursing to reach this goal. I have worked as a home health aide for ten years. I love my patients and feel most useful when doing this kind of work. So, I made that decision by looking at all of my options and considering my experiences.

Through this research, the participants have exhibited tremendous forethought and willingness to do the work. They have a vision of what they want to accomplish and are making small, scaffolded steps to achieve their dreams. This is a common attribute for adult learners as they generally enter collegial spaces with an understanding of their purpose and their goals. Renee reportedly did not want to go back to school for a degree initially because she felt she didn't have the time and liked to be free to learn about many different things. She said she considers herself *more of a 'certificates person'... or a 'lifelong learner.'* She remarked, *"If my job is giving any class, Excel training, seminar on just about anything, I am the first to sign up....I love to learn...* But ultimately, Renee knew she needed to follow her lifelong dream of becoming a nurse. She enrolled in community college and pursued what she calls *'her most authentic passion.'* She said:

I have been playing around for 17 years...doing different jobs in the nursing field, from being a nurse's aide to counseling people about STDs. I love being in the environment and talking to patients about their health. Now, I'm tired of watching others become what I should have been a long time ago and seeing them get the financial rewards that I want for me and my little girl. It's my time!

Several study participants (Adam, Jabari, Pilar, Renee, Senara, Shyā, and Yolanda) have reported taking introductory-level positions in the fields they plan to major in, in college. The constant immersion within the culture of the profession, the

rubbing of proverbial shoulders with those who are credentialed and experienced, and the learning of everyday practices and lingo have been inspirational for their journey; this has increased their desire to pursue their dreams.

Many adult learners enter the collegial space as life-long learners, as has been exhibited by two of our other study participants, Emanuel, who is pursuing his associate degree to maintain his family's legacy and be an example to his son, and Timothy, who is more concerned about staying active, relevant, and open to new technologies. Both students, over 60 years of age, consider themselves lifelong learners.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings reveal that the Dev-Ed*Lift* programmatic structure, embedded instructional practices, advisory support, and campus resources served as a foundational framework upon which successful outcomes for this student demographic can stand. Concerning the research questions, the findings have identified many of the circumstances and barriers that PTRLs face as they complete their remediation requirements and transition to their matriculated classes. Their lived experiences and that of the academic personnel who support them are varied, complex, compelling, and diverse, and no formulation or panacea would adequately address the concerns presented within this study. However, their explication of experience empowers the college and vicariously the embedded program to serve them more thoughtfully, strategically, and effectively.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This research aimed to explore the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners (PTRLs) in a specific developmental education program within a community college setting and to examine the perspectives and barriers that impact their collegial success. Committed to exposing that which has been historically hidden, the primary function of this research was to explicate in detail the PTRL experience by reviewing documentary data, and conducting, gathering, and analyzing interview data from 12 one-on-one interviews with Post-Traditional Remedial Learners, and a focus group with nine educational leaders. The culminating task is to discuss these critical findings, explore implications for practice, and make recommendations for future research.

### Discussion

This study draws attention to the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner within the community college setting who, despite their presence in academia, storied history that pairs with some of the most transformational eras in educational history, and their numerical prominence, largely remains *Hidden in Plain Sight* and absent from meaningful discussions, research, and strategic planning measures that would transform their collegial experience and elevate their academic outcomes.

The Post-Traditional Remedial Learner was initially perceived as an atypical and transient student population unsuitable for higher education because of their age, lower socio-economic status, family responsibilities, and work obligations; this trend and tendency of PTRL undervaluation was pervasive then and continues today (Payne, 1887; Taylor & House, 2010). As early as the 1940s, many policymakers believed that most

college students should be of traditional age; however, under public pressure in 1945, Congress allowed veterans over 25 to enroll in college and increased the time allotted to obtain their degrees (Fred, 1951; Olson, 1973). This open-access opportunity turned the tide for adult learners seeking academic credentialing.

Despite initial concerns that this *'new type of student'* would demoralize higher education, adult learners were constantly hailed for stability and maturity. They were also found to have higher grades and to be more goal-oriented and motivated than their 'traditional' counterparts. Common among adult learners was the desire to acquire an education for intrinsic reasons, such as improving self-esteem and self-concept. In contrast, many traditional students were more likely motivated by extrinsic motivations, such as following a life trajectory decided for them by a parent or hopes for future employment opportunities.

This historical frame of reference regarding adult learners is relevant to our discussion because it provides further context for the institutional perceptions of the value, desirability, and investment worthiness of Post-Traditional Learners in higher education, even further for those who require developmental or remedial interventions. While more significant numbers of adult learners are enrolling in higher education, 21st-century PTRLs continue to face similar institutional, structural, and financial barriers that were standard-issue during the 20th century. Unlike their traditional, first-year student counterparts, the institutional structure of higher education remains primarily disengaged from the needs of PTRLs, as exemplified by the paucity of available research, the absence of effective strategic planning measures, the lack of resources designated for the development of practical programming, the maintenance of outdated policies and

practices, the uninformed scheduling and course structures and the unavailability of adequate campus resources.

The impact of barriers erected by the college itself not only stymie the growth and potential of its PTRLs but stands in direct opposition to its commission and oath to serve them. A practical example is the lack of evening classes to accommodate working learners. Academic research, student surveys, and anecdotal evidence have indicated a ripe market in this regard – not offering them may be perceived as gross oversight or neglect. These tone-deaf institutional decisions contradict the college’s mission of opening doors of opportunity for student development and vicariously serve as gatekeepers against the wind of student progress. When coupled with situational and dispositional barriers which vie for first-place priority in students’ lives, it becomes too much for some to bear (Pelletier, 2010).

Our research has indicated that a significant component of the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner experience is choosing between fundamental, bread-and-butter issues and enrolling in college. The preeminence of situational barriers, contextualized through family, personal, and financial obligations, often outweighs the practicality of attending school. It causes many genuinely conscientious and capable students to delay or discontinue their educative opportunities.

Each of the Post-Traditional Remedial Learners who participated in the study was caught in this dynamic tension between meeting their in-school and out-of-school obligations. Issues related to family life, childcare concerns, the care of sick loved ones, mental health issues, and financial concerns represent only a few of the overwhelming situational barriers that threatened discontinuance for many of the students in the program

regardless of their distinction as traditional or Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. However, this challenge was more intensified for the adult learners, who were the breadwinners for their families and bore the responsibility for their basic needs and that of others.

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), there are two main barriers to adult learning: external or situational barriers that are typically defined as ‘influences which are external to the individual or at least beyond the individual’s control’ and internal or dispositional barriers that tend to be associated with those which ‘reflect personal attitudes, such as thinking one is too old to learn.’ In the case of the Dev-ED*Lift* program, these extrinsic or situational factors undoubtedly impacted the student's ability to complete coursework.

The study findings signal that student support services centering counseling and wellness services, childcare services, tutoring, and academic support services are some essential offices on campus that serve adult learners within the context of their lived experiences. These services do more than provide the necessary support; they engender connectedness and a sense of community, accountability, and belonging. The participants cite these sentiments and the Dev-Ed*Lift* program’s hands-on, student-centered advisement approach as consequential to their persistence in college.

Within this study, a ‘*Sense of Belonging*’ (*SOB*) also emerged as a critical component of the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner's engagement and persistence. Defined as a feeling of fitting in and being a valued part of a community, ‘*SOB*’ is generally recognized as essential for human beings' psychological, physical, and emotional well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Allen & Kern, 2017). Strayhorn (2012)

refers to the importance of belonging as a “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected and essential to the group or others on campus” (p. 17).

According to this description, the research participants, both academic personnel and PTRs, noted that students who feel a part of the campus community, finding their voice and place within the community of learners, are more likely to engage, seek support, embrace the value of the teaching moment, and persist in college. In addition, well-connected students are more likely to matriculate and advance toward earning their credentials after completing developmental milestones. The forging of deep connections and social integration allows students to build camaraderie with each other, socialize, ask questions, and normalize their experiences. The process of building and bonding student communities materialized through the cohort experience!

While peering through a more capacious lens, it is evident that institutions must develop new avenues for the social incorporation and development of their Post-Traditional Learners. *Their positionality as students who are ‘Hidden but Visible, Able but Underutilized, and Speaking but Silent’* must be challenged both by institutions and the educators who serve them. The complex nature of higher education’s relationship with its adult learners must be reimagined and set on a new course where they become integral to the college’s mission, plan, and work. Student support can no longer begin and end with the application, enrollment, and matriculation process. This short-lived exemplar of institutional interest does not exemplify a true sense of vesting into the lives of adult learners by the college and can lead to student disillusionment, disinterest, social isolation, and disconnection. Wyatt (2011) affirms that social isolation significantly

impacts students' success because students engaged within their campus communities are more likely to be satisfied and successful. Within this context, it is essential to note that two PTRs within the study determined that building collegial relationships and developing a sense of belonging was not consequential to their experience as adult learners. Instead, they anticipated receiving respect and cordiality but not a more profound camaraderie and involvement with fellow Post-Traditional colleagues.

Through this study, it also became evident that one's sense of belonging is cultivated not only through the institution's accessibility or open-door policy but through the engagement and interaction of collegial peers, academic personnel, and persons within the campus community. Hurtado and Carter (1997) note that intellectual and social interactions further enrich students' affiliation, connection, and identification with their colleges" (p. 328). These 'human connections' are a potent, practical, and potential-laden lever by which college success, engagement, and well-being may be developed (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). As a result, higher levels of student satisfaction, consistent educational engagement, and increased retention are more likely to ensue.

Against this background, it was necessary to foreground the importance of academic personnel and the faculty members who serve as educators, instructors, role models, mentors, advisors, and encouragers to students (Crisp, 2010; Pope et al., 2000). They are the critical influencers of students' success and sense of belonging. Within the one-on-one-interview protocol, several students noted the importance of having a teacher who was vested in their development and would provide support and insight as they pursued their learning objectives. They pointed out that this support gave them the

impetus to persist and encouraged them not to disappoint themselves or those who invested so lavishly into them. Providing an open door for student support through sharing information and resources, and setting high standards with the appropriate, adult-centered, scaffolded support systems, are critical determinants of students' acclimation within the collegial setting. Ultimately, having a strong community of support increases student enthusiasm and motivation to complete their remedial work and to pursue larger goals. This type of intentional engagement has many benefits for students beyond those of an academic nature.

Another important indicator of student engagement is attendance. Finn (1993) purports that school attendance is a vital participation behavior. It can exemplify students' integration into the learning community, impact their motivation and interest or signal disengagement and impending stop-outs. As mentioned in Chapter 4, documentary analysis was conducted by reviewing attendance records for each participant. Through it, the researcher corroborated the findings and found behavior trends in the attendance patterns of each student. It was found that the PTRLs who were more engaged, attending class regularly, completing homework assignments, attending tutoring, and other learning opportunities were unquestionably more consistent, persistent, and successful. Students with chronic absenteeism were more likely to disengage, perform poorly, or stop out.

Student enthusiasm, person-to-person connectedness, and programmatic participation also indicate collegial persistence. This was made possible through the intentional interactions enacted by the instructional and advisory teams. The impact of having college staff members and program personnel engage and take an interest in students' work proved transformational for their experience. The literature suggests that

having just one person within the institution with whom a strong sense of connection has been developed can significantly reduce attrition and impact a student's decision to remain in college (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen, Farren, & Vowell, 1996; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Kuh and Hu (2001) proffer that faculty-student interactions are strong determiners of students' positive experiences and educational outcomes throughout their college experience. Bye et al. (2007) affirm that learning becomes more enjoyable for the adult learner when there is a perceived collaboration with professors, leading to increased intrinsic motivation and positive effects.

Making time and space and providing opportunities and resources for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners is a significant part of college success. The teacher-student and advisor-student exchanges within this study proved to be particularly consequential for the PTRLs in the study. Providing available and practical resources for adult learners is critical for their successful experience because of the many responsibilities and limited time for non-academic interactions. Adult learners often need assistance balancing the inevitable inter-role conflicts within their lives. Student service departments such as academic advising, career services, counseling services, financial aid offices, and tutoring and writing centers are technically equipped to help them. However, these departments often operate under the assumption that most students are traditional (Bowl, 2001; Philibert, Allen, & Elleven, 2008) in that they are usually only open during regular working hours on weekdays and do not offer services online (Fairchild, 2003).

Within the context of this study, the researcher found that social services and non-academic resources, were generally available at Clearview Community College; however, additional work is required in providing academic scheduling that is more

conducive for adult learners who are only available in the evening due to full-time work schedules. Making time and space for students requires institutional decision-makers to make accommodations for adult learners that will facilitate a more seamless transition from application to remediation and from matriculation to graduation.

Another key takeaway from the research is the impact of early childhood experiences on successful outcomes for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. The acknowledgment that primary and secondary school experiences are to be envisioned as a cumulative process recognizes that there is simultaneously a cumulative impact that builds or retards momentum toward academic success. There is undoubtedly a ‘carry-over-effect’ that reinforces students' attitudes, academic behaviors, and general habits developed during the formative years; these attitudes, behaviors, and patterns become potent predictors of students' success at the post-secondary level (Bryk & Thum, 1989). An example is that students considered at risk of dropping out have been identified as early as third grade based on poor attendance patterns, unsuccessful school experiences, academic performance, and behavioral difficulties (Finn, 1989; Klem & Connell, 2004). The concept of being *Hidden in Plain Sight* is powerfully connected to a student trajectory that begins in childhood and follows through post-secondary education. This veritable reality was confirmed throughout the interview protocol as interviewees and focus group members established the influence and far-reaching effects of their early childhood experiences on their self-concept, self-esteem, and sense of belonging.

The researcher anticipated that prior learning opportunities, patterns of behaviors, and adverse childhood experiences might be consequential within the PTRL experience but hearing first-hand accounts through the lens of their lived experiences illuminated the

scope of the psychological and emotional barriers which were erected during childhood; these barriers are undoubtedly a factor that impacts success in college. The researcher found in many cases that the (K 12) educational experiences, home life, and social interactions affect their ‘emotional default responses’ and must be continually overcome if they are to engage and persist in college.

### **Connection to Prior Research**

An expansive body of literature focalizes the first-year or traditional student within the academy, while substantive research on Post-Traditional Remedial Learners is mainly absent. With the influx of studies highlighting the challenges of remediation, the difficulties experienced by adult learners, and higher education’s quandary regarding what to do about it, few studies acknowledge the presence of the *Post-Traditional Remedial Learner* in higher education. Their expunction within literature and neglect within the institutional strategic planning efforts raise essential concerns about the PTRLs’ acceptance within the academy. Kasworm (2010) affirmed that universities are youth-centric and derive their reputations from the traditional student population, resulting in uneven or unavailable support for adult learners. This dilemma is further complicated as we consider the challenge of students who enter the academy without the benefit of essential skill competencies in Reading, Writing, and Math.

For the past two decades, a radical shift has been underway in public colleges as they move away from previously held standards of practice regarding remediation and developmental interventions. Given the community college mission of providing “inclusive institutions that welcome all who desire to learn, regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience” (AACC, 2015), community colleges have

long been designated as the postsecondary sector that is most equipped to meet the adult learners needs and to take on the developmental education conundrum. As a result, most state and institutional policies of 4-year universities and colleges prohibit the admission of students requiring remediation and often direct such students to community colleges (Jacobs, 2012). However, many community colleges have begun to rethink and reassess remediation, phasing it out to embrace a more ‘fast-tracked’ approach to filling learning gaps. This is often accomplished through co-requisite coursework, which pairs pre-requisite knowledge and skills with the more advanced subject matter. Further research is necessary to determine the efficacy of the corequisite educational models.

With opposing political views, philosophies, and ideologies concerning the viability and appropriateness of remediation in community colleges, we still find few solutions to address this proliferating need. Research from the U.S. Department of Education estimates that nearly half of all first-year students today are taking some form of remedial coursework, with 40% of those starting at a 4-year institution and 68% of those starting in a community college taking at least one remedial course during their college careers (Chen, 2016). With the educational quagmire furthered by the COVID-19 global pandemic and the two-plus years of endemic miseducation and missed educational opportunities, the need for developmental education is more pervasive than ever.

### **Connection of Findings to Research Questions**

The researcher approached this study through three guiding questions (1) What are the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework? (2) What motivates administrators, instructors, and advisors to work with and support Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework, and (3) What are

the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?

### **Research Question #1**

The first research question in this study examined the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework. An analysis of the interview and focus group data found that students taking developmental coursework had varied experiences based on the complexity of their identities and educational journeys. As was conveyed during the interviews, each student's journey is deeply personal. It is intrinsically tied to factors including but not limited to their K-12 education, family dynamics, childhood experiences, culture and ethnicity, race and gender, financial and socio-economic status, available support systems, and sense of belonging. Each identity or characteristic shapes their perspective and how they view the world. Finding the unifying factor that speaks to each student is the gordian knot which challenges this study.

The experience of Post-Traditional Learners taking remedial or developmental education courses was reportedly positive. Having spent years away from traditional educational settings in most cases, remediation was perceived as a much-needed refresher and opportunity to strengthen their intellectual abilities and college readiness skills. In some cases, the skills of the PTRLs were inferior due to disuse, while others had gaps in their learning because of a lack of previous exposure to the subject matter. True to every experience, a few PTRLs initially had an unpleasant reaction to the need for pre-college basic skills education. They felt disappointed and even insulted by the prospect of taking developmental coursework. They reportedly wanted to “Get right to their matriculated

classes!’ However, the impact of time and space on their primary skill knowledge became evident soon after day one of the class. Eventually, each of the PTRLs reported seeing the need for pre-college preparation. Several interviewees even suggested that developmental coursework be offered for all disciplines and majors to provide a proverbial head start for students who deferred their college experience.

Through the developmental education experience, each Post-Traditional Remedial Learner expressed their pleasure with the ability to access resources, be informed of navigating college systems in a semi-protected, fully supported environment, and make friends that they could relate to, study with, laugh with and find common ground with. During an open house event sponsored by the Dev-Ed *Lift* program, the adult learners could be found taking notes, asking questions, gathering materials, and generally lingering to hear, see and sense the full measure of the college experience. The traditional students, in this instance, were not fully engaged but were more motivated to move to the next step quickly or leave for the day. Also, the sense of gratitude from the PTRLs was palpable. When the students were exposed to the campus resources, you could see the elation, excitement, and conviction in their eyes. They appeared to have found their time and their place.

Regarding the PTRLs' educational practice, the academic personnel reported that there were some minor differences between the educational acumen of first-year students and adult learners, but they were overcome by the PTRL's attitude toward learning, willingness to complete assigned work, readiness to practice, and desire to read course materials before class; their intentionality toward their studies spanned the distance. In some cases, adult learners could think critically and grasp concepts in ways far superior

to traditional first-year students. Adult learners were, in many cases, more inclined to access the campus resources, schedule tutoring, visit the library, and ask questions within the class context. According to the instructors, the traditional students generally had an insouciant approach to engagement and learning. At the same time, the Post-Traditional learners came with an appetency to achieve and an intrinsic motivation that propelled them to complete the developmental education cycles without delay.

### **Research Question #2**

The second research question in this study examined the motivating factors that inspired academic personnel and educational leaders to work with Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. The visionary leaders, driven by the confines of their own intersecting identities, were motivated in different ways to work with the population. For some, it was refreshing, after years in academia and having experienced the peaks and valleys of student engagement, to have learners who understood the value of education and were open and eager to engage and take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. The instructors, with particularity, perceived the Post-Traditional learners as some of their most capable students possessing a discipline, drive, and determination missing in many traditional community college students. For this cause, the Post-Traditional Learner often emerged as leaders within the classroom environment and became a refreshing addition, bringing a well-rounded and prudent perspective that enriched discussions and meaningful collegial exchanges.

Inspired by their Post-Traditional journeys, several focus group members connected deeply to the trauma that surfaced regarding the student barriers, perspectives, and experiences. This was an unexpected dimension of the research. Professional training

historically places emotional distance between the student and instructor but having a time of reflection caused the focus group members to reconnect to their educational roots, history, and commonalities with the PTRLs. As a result, the academic personnel began to voice the need for real student engagement. They suggested the importance of providing additional staff training, mentorship, and the development of institutional systems that would better prepare them to give the PTRLs a unique and fulfilling college experience. Focus group members began to muse that they desired each student to have an opportunity to be a student and enjoy a thrilling educational experience that provided an opportunity for engagement, preparation, belonging, and, most importantly, graduation.

Pivotal to this study is the importance of educators remembering their experiences as learners and bringing a sense of empathy and justice to the collegial space. Repeatedly within the context of the interview protocols, the administrators had an opportunity to connect with their early educational experiences, recalling their journeys as international students and persons without the benefit of their community of origin, language, or school support. The educator's reflective process is essential to supporting the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner. Educational leaders without empathy and a hands-on approach to student engagement render the student experience void and their practice unfulfilled. These connections do not automatically flourish; they must be planted, nurtured, and tended regularly. This becomes possible when institutions begin to change their training practices, ideologies, and dogma to reflect the realities of the student's needs and accept the gifts, abilities, prior knowledge, and experiences they possess as valid.

### **Research Question # 3**

The third research question in this study examined the central issues and potential challenges that Post-Traditional Remedial Learners face as they complete remedial coursework. As alluded to in RQ1 and RQ2, PTRLs face many situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers to achieving their remediation milestones. Before PTRLs enter the hallowed halls of academia, many challenges centering on family and self-sacrifice, finances and basic needs, self-confidence, and ability to learn, undiagnosed learning differences and illness, work schedule and making time for school, couples with more affective or emotional concerns centering doubt, depression, anxiety, fear, frustration, anger, and shame. These dispositional barriers are impactful for their successful completion of remediation and impact persistence in college.

In this study, central recurring issues surrounded an array of intense emotions as the students attempted to enroll and persist in school. Several students noted experiencing extreme happiness at the prospect of aligning with school and anger and shame at being, what they consider, an uneducated adult. To enroll in college amid overcoming financial difficulties, work and scheduling challenges, problematic bosses, crying children, misunderstanding spouses, few financial resources, and poor skills is an overwhelming feat. However, the PTRLs have each, in their way, overcome extraordinary odds to thrive in this new experience.

Important to note is the power of the dispositional barriers that impact the adult student. Balancing an array of interpersonal, collegial, and vocational experiences can be daunting but can be eased through strategic support. Critical junctures must be couched with support and resources to benefit this student population. For example, the college

enrollment and transition processes are dynamic, evolving, and multi-dimensional. The student requires institutional support, preparation, and oversight. Without this, their collegial plan may be aborted before it begins.

Many student challenges were raised within the context of the family, the finances, and the future. Reportedly, the family absentee gaps were noted as the most troubling because of their impact on the family structure and the children. Several interviewees noted that time in pursuit of higher education goals meant not being able to be present to watch their children grow or to fill the financial gaps imposed by the reduction of work time and loss of overtime pay. These challenges were reported as destabilizing and causing familial and economic tensions in the home.

Another common barrier to adult education is childcare concerns. Some research participants were reluctant to attend college because of the commensurate sacrifice of time with their young children. They felt guilty about prioritizing themselves or taking the much-needed financial resources to attend school. In some cases, the PTRLs reportedly could not manage the financial burden of childcare costs simultaneously with their school fees. Because of this common scenario, many PTRL participants have delayed their dreams of returning to school until their children are older.

The barriers are often more academic, as students who have been out of school for many years may not have the same ability to think critically, synthesize information, or endure the rigors of the college classroom. In addition to the normal fraying of knowledge over time, persons with deeper learning needs often need more support because there is usually no robust infrastructure to address different learning styles and

needs. This institutional barrier can have a debilitating impact on the progressive movement of adult remedial learners to their credited classes.

Other potential challenges to college success are self and social sabotage. Many students addressed the impact of the lack of support from their family and friends on their motivation to persist and their ability to change long-standing habits to accommodate school. They noted that they had to change their circle of friends in some instances to accommodate their new lives in academia. There was a general sense of loneliness and loss that was reported. One of the interviewees commented that when he told his friends, he was going to school, they laughed at him and instead attempted to distract him by engaging in unhealthy and unprofitable behaviors. This participant scenario affirms the need for the support of family and loved ones in one's pursuit of high education. The mockery of friends and loved ones can wear on the learner's self-esteem and based on their intrinsic motivation and ability to manage emotional discomfort, could become a mitigating factor.

Another significant barrier to connection for adult learners is college readiness. This includes navigating campus systems, accessing resources, acclimating to digital technology within the educational setting, and developing study skills. The PTRLs in this study overwhelmingly struggled to adapt to the collegial systems initially, as they did not know how to perform routine tasks like navigating the college website, paying for classes online, completing financial aid documents, accessing Blackboard, and uploading documents for their classes. For some, it was as challenging as learning a new language. This was a daunting process for some of the students, particularly those who were over the age of 40 years. The initial use of cell phones for online classes is a vivid example of

unpreparedness that was commonplace for some students. Several students in this context attested that they had never opened a computer before enrolling in college and faced high anxiety and stress. Some of the older participants reflected that they felt the full impact of their age as they watched some of the younger students in the class who were quick and capable in areas that reportedly took them ‘forever’ to accomplish. Feelings of intimidation and ineptitude were foregrounded as a significant concern.

### **Connection to Framework**

Critical to this discussion is the study’s theoretical underpinnings, which are based on The Theory of Constructivism and Malcolm Knowles's Theory of Andragogy. Knowles (1980) begins his analysis of ‘adults as learners’ by assuming that adults are self-directing and self-reliant. He also posits that adults want education to complement and consider the complexity of the rest of their adult lives. He champions a more “adult-like” pedagogical educational system (Knowles, 1980).

This study highlights the importance of providing andragogical learning and teaching opportunities for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. Although learning developmental content, ‘how’ adults learn, synthesize information, and are motivated differs from their pedagogical counterparts. Primary concepts of andragogy recognize adult learners as best inspired and stimulated through internal versus external means. This was evidenced throughout the study as the PTRLs proactively pursued their education, overcoming barriers to enrollment, health challenges, financial depravity, and educational loss to enroll in college. Their commitment was indomitable and internally constructed.

Within the framework of andragogical learning, PTRLs reportedly flourished when they were provided clear directives on what was to be taught and how that

information could be used to advance their goals. As evident within the document analysis, each course manual outlined the syllabus, and multiple academic and social resources were provided. These resources were the foundation for co-creation, collaboration, and conferencing opportunities between the PTRLs and college advisors. Access to the resources without interference provided a relished autonomy and helped affirm their sense of agency. They were presented with information in advance and had a time-bound, stepwise approach to completion and an open-door policy with their advisors for further discussion.

Also embedded within the program were opportunities for online and in-person engagement. The PTRL scholars shared special events online and in person, providing space for community building and exchanging ideas. The events also presented an opportunity to introduce the students to the larger campus community, easing their transition from developmental education into matriculated courses. This was noted as particularly useful by the students who reported feeling less anxious about enrolling in college because of the prior exposure to other programs, persons, and resources within the larger campus community.

Within the research study, metacognition was also evidenced as the Post-Traditional Remedial Learners used their *knowledge of self* to inform their future educational practices and priorities. Both strengths and weaknesses are essential to this process, advising and signaling what areas require critical thinking and tangible, practical, real-life associations. Victor (2004) affirms that *Metacognition* is one of the theories that completes the constructivist learning theory; it enables learners to relate their

old information with the new information, become aware of their learning, and internalize what they learn.

This lens allowed PTRLs to emerge as experts in their own experience and provided a base upon which future information could be established. Specifically, they could take what they knew through the metacognitive experience to inform how to approach everyday academic functions like setting up tutoring appointments, academic advisement, and creating study groups. These ideas highlight that adults bring a great deal of background experience and prior learning to any new educational setting. Despite perceived gaps in their pre-collegial skill set, many students thrive in college because of their intrinsic motivation, readiness, internal fortitude, grit, and desire to achieve. In most cases, time and life have provided a more precise perspective; the Post-Traditional Remedial Learners understand the value of education and are desirous of using their time wisely to achieve their goals.

The theories of Andragogy and Constructivism are aligned, providing the theoretical fulcrum upon which this study is supported. The theoretical framework approaches views and regards adult learners as catalysts and co-laborers within their growth process. This more collaborative, feedback-driven approach provides definitive and collaborative ways that they may continue to thrive and excel at the given tasks. Adult education does not infer that you are relegated to self-instruction; instead, educators' partner with you by creating relevant content, encouraging self-direction, organizing opportunities for robust discussion, and providing a real-life-driven scaffolded path to success. Ultimately, educators and practitioners are responsible for helping adult learners advance by providing a safe space to learn, co-create and explore. It is essential

to provide relevant information and access while assisting them to perceive the value of and deepen their connections between their prior knowledge, earlier learning experiences, and new information (Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2007).

### **Implications for Future Research**

Although the findings from the case study are significant, they represent the perceptions and experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners at only one program in one community college setting. This gives a minimal basis for generalization. Tellis (1997) affirms that a common criticism of case study design is its dependency on a single case exploration making it challenging to reach a generalizing conclusion. However, it is essential because it establishes parameters for which types of students and scenarios fall under the rubric of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. This widens the door and scope for further research.

There is much room for further investigation regarding the lived experiences of PTRL and how higher education can take a more proactive role in learning about this student demographic. Reimagining policy and praxis, considering the theoretical lens employed in this research study, will provide higher education institutions with a standard of care regarding teaching and learning that would prove helpful for this student demographic. It will provide the support this student demographic needs and impact their path from remediation to persistence and credential acquisition. Also, based on the interview responses of the academic leaders, a cumulative case study design could be implemented, centering the voices of educational leaders across many sites regarding the types of training received and required from the institutions as they provide a deeper level of institutional insight into the care and support of this student demographic.

Further, the research interview and focus group protocols were executed during the COVID-19 pandemic prompting unique questions regarding remote learning and how that impacts knowledge acquisition, persistence, community development, and sense of belonging. Also, conducting this research again using participant observation as the literal third leg of this study: interviews, focus groups, and participant observation could provide a new dimension to the Post Traditional student at work. This happened organically on several occasions as the researcher was thrust into positions where they interacted with the Post-Traditional Remedial Learners. Observing their interactions while navigating campus spaces provided a unique lens and further substantiated the collected data. Finally, research on how age and national origin might impact student disposition and sense of belonging may add substantively to the dialogue regarding this student group. The data trends indicated substantial differences based on age and national origin.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

The findings from this case study reveal that the *Dev-EdLift* program at Clearview Community College has taken steps to create an environment where success for its Post-Traditional Remedial Learners is prioritized. A warm and welcoming environment laden with academic and social support has been established. The *Dev-EdLift* program and college have made an outstanding effort to understand its student population and create social structures that can bear the weight of their needs. These findings can provide a standard of care for Post Traditional Remedial Learners, which would include setting high standards which are scaffolded with educator support, the use of andragogical and constructivist theoretical underpinnings to connect student engagement and learning to

theory, the encouragement of campus community and a sense of belonging by including students in campus-driven workshops, training, and special events. These initiatives would be guided by themes that acknowledge the adult learner as a priority constituent in the community college setting and connect them to services and support on the matriculated side of the college, transforming their academic transition and increasing the likelihood of persistence.

Training opportunities would make actionable the discussions and data-driven research that has been collected and would help to investigate ways in which the PTRL classroom experience may be enhanced. Acknowledging learning styles and adapting classroom lessons and curriculum knowledge to meet the needs of diverse learners is also a critical component. In like manner, providing classes with course modalities that align with student abilities, scheduling needs, and learning styles is imperative. Creative instructional models like the flipped classroom could be coupled with dynamic digital learning modules, which would provide ‘educational aftercare’ for ambitious students or those needing review or refreshing.

This study has undoubtedly surfaced several findings that lead us to believe that providing specific services earmarked for *Post-Traditional Remedial Learners* might advance and encourage students' sense of belonging, vestment, and persistence. In the same way that First Year students have programming geared toward helping them to start strong in college, similar programming should be designed for PTRLs. This endeavor could be achieved by establishing PTRL-specific campus support groups, educational societies, and special events dedicated to their upward mobility, career advancement, and social success. In addition, the program and college could connect with other programs

and campuses within their collegial network, aligning this student demographic with other adults and resources, and widening the circle of knowledge and support.

Other key findings in the study were the high emotional discomfit that adult learners endure because of their bipolarity of experience as adults in the *real world* and college students who require basic skills support. The College could ensure that each student in this category would have collaborative forums and peer mentoring throughout the collegial experience, from remediation through degree acquisition. Financial incentives for academic excellence could be employed, and robust and round-the-clock online academic and social support could be provided. Though seemingly small initiatives, they would provide a wealth of support and translate their importance and visibility to the students on campus.

## **Conclusion**

This case study aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences, and barriers for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners in a specific developmental education program within the community college setting and how their perceptions and experiences may have influenced their student success. After interviewing and absorbing the profundity and complexity of the Post-Traditional Remedial Learning experience, several conclusions were drawn. First, Post-Traditional Remedial Learners must be prioritized in the community college through faculty training, fiscal prioritization, and resource allocation. Second, a collaborative andragogical approach must be considered in lesson planning, execution, and oversight. Third, a Division for Post-Traditional learning should be developed, providing ongoing support for this student demographic from remediation (if needed) to graduation. In it, services would be deployed, continually updated

information and resources would be housed, and academic personnel would be available to help. These measures would impact remedial education and transform it into developmental education for the students. Further, academic personnel who are front facing with this student demographic must receive the necessary training.

The results of this study filled a gap in the literature and extended our knowledge regarding the adult learner experiencing developmental education in community college. The study found that the Dev-Ed*Lift* program at Clearview Community College made tremendous efforts to support student achievement and a sense of belonging by enrolling students with intrusive advisement support, academic services, and access to the college resources vis à vis the developmental education program. The students' online and campus-based classes found an inclusive and supportive environment that worked extensively to create a sense of community and provide support. Study findings indicate that the first engagement with the college and program was positive, and the participants reported feeling at ease within the inner workings of the Dev-Ed*Lift* program. Specifically, the study found that student engagement with the program positively impacted the student's sense of belonging and desire to persist and matriculate.

Post-Traditional Remedial Learners have long been *Hidden in Plain Sight* and have not been provided the opportunities, services, and support that their status demands. Through the reimagining, adoption, and implementation of measures that specifically meet their needs, the community college will strengthen its fivefold commitment to serve the community of students regardless of their culture, creed, or national origin, to build a campus culture of justice, egalitarianism, and equity, to identify and implement campus

structures which encourage equity and to provide financial support for the various college constituents without discrimination of need.

**APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER**



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)



## APPENDIX B: PTRLS PARTICIPANT PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

1. What is your gender?
  - Female
  - Male
  - Other (specify)
  
2. Which category below includes your age?
  - 17 or younger
  - 18-20
  - 21-29
  - 30-39
  - 40-49
  - 50-59
  - 60 or older
  
3. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
  - Employed, working 40 or more hours per week
  - Employed, working 1-39 hours per week
  - Not employed, looking for work
  - Not employed, NOT looking for work
  - Retired
  - Disabled, not able to work
  
4. Are you White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander, or some other race?
  - White
  - Black or African-American
  - American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - Asian
  - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - From multiple races
  - Some other race (please specify)
  
5. What college major are you considering?
  - Education
  - Criminal Justice
  - Nursing
  - Liberal Arts

- Other (please specify)
6. Time Away From College
- Between 2 & 4 years
  - Between 5 & 7 years
  - Over 7 years
7. What is your primary reason for attending college?
- Advance your career
  - Increase earning potential
  - To learn something new
  - To meet new people
  - To challenge yourself
  - To attain your degree
8. What is your marital status?
- Married
  - Divorced
  - Single
  - In a Committed Relationship
  - It's Complicated
9. Dependents & Responsibility
- Caring for a loved one
  - Caretaker for Elder
  - 1 Dependent
  - 2 Dependents
  - Three or more Dependents
10. Do you feel a sense of belonging on your college campus?
- Yes, I feel as though I belong
  - I feel okay
  - I feel as though I don't belong
  - I feel invisible on campus
11. Which of the following best describes your school schedule?
- Full-Time Schedule / 12 equated credits or more
  - Part-Time Schedule / Less than 12 equated credits

## APPENDIX C: STUDENT PARTICIPANT LETTER OF CONSENT



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

You are invited to participate in a research study on Post-Traditional Remedial Learners in community colleges. The study explores the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners enrolled in a community college setting and reveals how their sense of belonging impacts success within the postsecondary environment. The study is *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Case Study Analysis Exploring the Lived Experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and their Determinants of Student Success*.

**Researcher:** My name is Pamela Eatman-Skinner, and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University, Queens, NY, in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership. I will be conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation. My faculty mentor is Dr. Katherine Aquino, Ph.D., with the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership.

**Description of the Study:** I am researching remediation for post-traditional learners on a single community college campus. Through this focus group/interview, I hope to gain more insight into this topic to increase their sense of belonging and help students transition through college successfully.

**Participants:** The selection criteria for participation in this study are Post-Traditional Remedial Learners ages 25 and older who have participated in developmental education courses.

**Description of Procedures:** In this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. You will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences as a post-traditional learner in developmental education courses. The participation requirements for this study are approximately 1 hour of your time. You will be asked to describe your experience(s), and the researcher will occasionally ask questions to understand your lived experience better.

**Participation and Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate with no penalty and withdraw from the study. Your interview responses will be kept strictly confidential. Only the principal investigator (Pamela Eatman – Skinner) will have access to the information you provide. Any information obtained from this study will only be used for the researcher's dissertation study purposes.

The interview will be conducted via Webex video conferencing. Within this platform, you will be audio and video recorded. The recordings will not be shared with any other person or entity, and any mention of your name will be removed. After that, the recorded interviews will be transcribed and used solely for this study. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview and will have a chance to authorize your reflections. The researcher will be the only person to know the real names and faces of the participants. All participants will be given an alias in the study to conceal their identity. All data will be stored on a locked and password-protected external hard drive and in a file cabinet.

Participants should be aware that (a) the researcher will encrypt all email correspondence to protect their privacy, and (b) all Webex sessions will only be attended by the researcher and the participant for synchronous (face-to-face via video conference) interviews.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risk factors associated with this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions or find that they don't apply to you, you can state that you do not wish to answer the question or that it does not apply to you. The researcher will provide you with a debriefing time at the end of the interview to discuss how it felt to discuss the information.

**Benefits:** Your participation will help community colleges better understand the post-traditional student experience in developmental classes and how institutions might better support their growth, development, and ultimate credential acquisition.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions or ethical concerns about this study, do not hesitate to email me at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu) or call me at (914) 570.4807. You may also contact my faculty mentor, Dr. Katherine Aquino, Ph.D., at St. John's University, 8000 Utopia Pkwy, Queens, NY 11429, or at [czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu).

**Student Researcher:**

Pamela V. Eatman - Skinner, Doctoral Student,  
St. John's University, The School of Education, Queens, NY,  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu)

Signatures for consent to participate in the study

I am enclosing a copy of my IRB approval and the list of interview questions that I will ask throughout the interview process. Below you will find an Informed Consent Form for your signature. Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of this consent form and your willingness to participate. Remember that you can withdraw your participation in this study without penalty.

**Name and Signature of Participant:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please print your name (*Participant*)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of *Student Participant*

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of *Student Researcher*

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signatures for permission to be audio and video recorded during interview sessions

If you have read and understood the study’s purpose, the procedures to be followed, the benefits, risks, and confidentiality clause, and have given consent **for your interview sessions to be audio and video recorded as participants in this research study**, please sign below to complete this consent form. You may review these recordings and request that all or any part of the recordings is destroyed or excluded. *Your signature below indicates that you agree to be audio and video recorded during the interviews for this study, with the understanding that you are free to withdraw your participation in this study at any point without penalty. If you withdraw, all recordings of the interviews will be destroyed.*

*Check both boxes*

I consent to be audio recorded during the interviews for this study.

I consent to be video recorded during the interviews for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant:

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please print your name: (*Participant*)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Researcher:

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Principal Investigator**  
Pamela V. Eatman-Skinner  
pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu

**Doctoral Mentor**  
Dr. Katherine Aquino Ph.D.  
[czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: ADMINISTRATOR'S LETTER OF CONSENT



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

You are invited to participate in a research study on Post-Traditional Remedial Learners in community colleges. The study explores the lived experiences of post-traditional remedial learners enrolled in a community college setting and revealed how their sense of belonging impacts success within the postsecondary environment. The study is *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Case Study Analysis Exploring the Lived Experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and their Determinants of Student Success*.

**Researcher:** My name is Pamela Eatman-Skinner, and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University, Queens, NY, in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership. I will be conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation. My faculty mentor is Dr. Katherine Aquino, Ph.D., with the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership.

**Description of the Study:** I am researching remediation for post-traditional learners on a single community college campus. Through this focus group, I hope to gain more insight into this topic to increase their sense of belonging and help students transition through college successfully.

**Participants:** The selection criteria for participation in this study are Post-Traditional Remedial Learners ages 25 and older who have participated in developmental education courses, remedial instructors, advisors, and college administrators.

**Description of Procedures:** In this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group. You will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences working with post-traditional learners in developmental education courses. The participation requirements for this study are approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes of your time.

**Participation and Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate with no penalty and withdraw from the study. Your focus group responses will be kept strictly confidential. Only the principal investigator (Pamela Eatman – Skinner) will have access to the information you provide. Any information obtained from this study will only be used for the researcher's dissertation study purposes.

The focus group will be conducted via Webex video conferencing. Within this platform, you will be video recorded. The recordings will not be shared with any other person or entity, and any mention of your name will be removed. After that, the recorded

interviews will be transcribed and used solely for this study. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of the focus group and will have a chance to authorize your reflections. The researcher will be the only person to know the real names and faces of the participants. All participants will be given an alias in the study to conceal their identity. All data will be stored on a locked and password-protected external hard drive and in a file cabinet.

Participants should be aware that (a) the researcher will encrypt all email correspondence to protect their privacy, and (b) all Webex sessions will only be attended by the researcher and the participant for synchronous (face-to-face via video conference) interviews.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risk factors associated with this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions or find that they don't apply to you, you can state that you do not wish to answer the question or that it does not apply to you. The researcher will provide you with a debriefing time at the end of the interview to discuss how it felt to discuss the information.

**Benefits:** Your participation will help community college administrators better understand the Post-Traditional student experience in developmental classes and how institutions might better support their growth, development, and ultimate credential acquisition.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions or ethical concerns about this study, do not hesitate to email me at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu) or call me at (914) 570.4807. You may also contact my faculty mentor, Dr. Katherine Aquino, Ph.D., at St. John's University, 8000 Utopia Pkwy, Queens, NY 11429, or at [czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu).

**Student Researcher:**

Pamela V. Eatman - Skinner, Doctoral Student,  
St. John's University, The School of Education, Queens, NY,  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu)

Signatures for consent to participate in the study

I am enclosing a copy of my IRB approval and the list of focus questions I will ask throughout the interview. Below you will find an Informed Consent Form for your signature. Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of this consent form and your willingness to participate. Remember that you can withdraw your participation in this study without penalty.

**Name and Signature of Participant:**

Please print your name (*Participant*)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of *Student Participant*

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of *Student Researcher*

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signatures for permission to be audio and video recorded during interview sessions

If you have read and understood the study's purpose, the procedures to be followed, the benefits, risks, and confidentiality clause, and have given consent **for your interview sessions to be audio and video recorded as participants in this research study**, please sign below to complete this consent form. You may review these recordings and request that all or any part of the recordings is destroyed or excluded. *Your signature below indicates that you agree to be audio and video recorded during the interviews for this study, with the understanding that you are free to withdraw your participation in this study at any point without penalty. If you withdraw, all recordings of the interviews will be destroyed.*

*Check both boxes*

I consent to be audio recorded during the interviews for this study.

I consent to be video recorded during the interviews for this study.

Signature of participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please print your name: (*Participant*)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Researcher:

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Principal Investigator**  
Pamela V. Eatman-Skinner  
pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu

**Doctoral Mentor**  
Dr. Katherine Aquino Ph.D.  
[czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E: FACULTY LETTER OF CONSENT



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

You are invited to participate in a research study on Post-Traditional Remedial Learners in community colleges. The study explores the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial learners enrolled in a community college setting and examines how their sense of belonging impacts success within the postsecondary environment. The study is *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Case Study Analysis Exploring the Lived Experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and their Determinants of Student Success*.

**Researcher:** My name is Pamela Eatman-Skinner, and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University, Queens, NY, in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership. I will be conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation. My faculty mentor is Dr. Katherine Aquino, Ph.D., with the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership.

**Description of the Study:** I am researching remediation for post-traditional learners on a single community college campus. Through this focus group, I hope to gain more insight into this topic to increase their sense of belonging and help students transition through college successfully.

**Participants:** The selection criteria for participation in this study are Post-Traditional Remedial Learners ages 25 and older who have participated in developmental education courses, remedial instructors, advisors, and college administrators.

**Description of Procedures:** In this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group. You will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences working with post-traditional learners in developmental education courses. The participation requirements for this study are approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes of your time.

**Participation and Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate with no penalty and withdraw from the study. Your interview responses will be kept strictly confidential. Only the principal investigator (Pamela Eatman – Skinner) will have access to the information you provide. Any information obtained from this study will only be used for the researcher's dissertation study purposes.

The focus group will be conducted via Webex video conferencing. Within this platform, you will be audio and video recorded. The recordings will not be shared with any other person or entity, and any mention of your name will be removed. After that, the recorded

interviews will be transcribed and used solely for this study. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview and will have a chance to authorize your reflections. The researcher will be the only person to know the real names and faces of the participants. All participants will be given an alias in the study to conceal their identity. All data will be stored on a locked and password-protected external hard drive and in a file cabinet.

Participants should be aware that (a) the researcher will encrypt all email correspondence to protect their privacy, and (b) all Webex sessions will only be attended by the researcher and the participant for synchronous (face-to-face via video conference) interviews.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risk factors associated with this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions or find that they don't apply to you, you can state that you do not wish to answer the question or that it does not apply to you. The researcher will provide you with a debriefing time at the end of the interview to discuss how it felt to discuss the information.

**Benefits:** Your participation will help community colleges better understand the post-traditional student experience in developmental classes and how institutions might better support their growth, development, and ultimate credential acquisition.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions or ethical concerns about this study, do not hesitate to email me at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu) or call me at (914) 570.4807. You may also contact my faculty mentor, Dr. Katherine Aquino, Ph.D., at St. John's University, 8000 Utopia Pkwy, Queens, NY 11429, or at [czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu).

**Student Researcher:**

Pamela V. Eatman - Skinner, Doctoral Student,  
St. John's University, The School of Education, Queens, NY,  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu)

Signatures for consent to participate in the study

I am enclosing a copy of my IRB approval and the list of interview questions that I will ask throughout the interview process. Below you will find an Informed Consent Form for your signature. Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of this consent form and your willingness to participate. Remember that you can withdraw your participation in this study without penalty.

**Name and Signature of Participant:**

Please print your name (*Participant*)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature of *Student Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature of *Student Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signatures for permission to be audio and video recorded during interview sessions

If you have read and understood the study’s purpose, the procedures to be followed, the benefits, risks, and confidentiality clause, and have given consent ***for your interview sessions to be audio and video recorded as participants in this research study***, please sign below to complete this consent form. You may review these recordings and request that all or any part of the recordings is destroyed or excluded. *Your signature below indicates that you agree to be audio and video recorded during the interviews for this study, with the understanding that you are free to withdraw your participation in this study at any point without penalty. If you withdraw, all recordings of the interviews will be destroyed.*

*Check both boxes*

I consent to be audio recorded during the interviews for this study.

I consent to be video recorded during the interviews for this study.

Signature of participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please print your name: *(Participant)*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature of Student Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Principal Investigator**

Pamela V. Eatman-Skinner  
pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu

**Doctoral Mentor**

Dr. Katherine Aquino Ph.D.  
[czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F: ADVISOR'S LETTER OF CONSENT



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

You are invited to participate in a research study on Post-Traditional Remedial Learners in community colleges. The study explores the lived experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners enrolled in a community college setting and how their sense of belonging impacts success within the postsecondary environment. The study is *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Case Study Analysis Exploring the Lived Experiences of Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and their Determinants of Student Success*.

**Researcher:** My name is Pamela Eatman-Skinner, and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University, Queens, NY, in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership. I will be conducting a study for my doctoral dissertation. My faculty mentor is Dr. Katherine Aquino, Ph.D., with the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership.

**Description of the Study:** I am researching remediation for post-traditional learners on a single community college campus. Through this focus group, I hope to gain more insight into this topic to increase their sense of belonging and help students transition through college successfully.

**Participants:** The selection criteria for participation in this study are Post-Traditional Remedial Learners ages 25 and older who have participated in developmental education courses, remedial instructors, advisors, and college administrators.

**Description of Procedures:** In this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group. You will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences working with post-traditional learners in developmental education courses. The participation requirements for this study are approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes of your time.

**Participation and Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate with no penalty and withdraw from the study. Your focus group responses will be kept strictly confidential. Only the principal investigator (Pamela Eatman – Skinner) will have access to the information you provide. Any information obtained from this study will only be used for the researcher's dissertation study purposes.

The focus group will be conducted via Webex video conferencing. Within this platform, you will be video recorded. The recordings will not be shared with any other person or entity, and any mention of your name will be removed. After that, the recorded

interviews will be transcribed and used solely for this study. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of the focus group and will have a chance to authorize your reflections. The researcher will be the only person to know the real names and faces of the participants. All participants will be given an alias in the study to conceal their identity. All data will be stored on a locked and password-protected external hard drive and in a file cabinet.

Participants should be aware that (a) the researcher will encrypt all email correspondence to protect their privacy, and (b) all Webex sessions will only be attended by the researcher and the participant for synchronous (face-to-face via video conference) interviews.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risk factors associated with this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions or find that they don't apply to you, you can state that you do not wish to answer the question or that it does not apply to you. The researcher will provide you with a debriefing time at the end of the interview to discuss how it felt to discuss the information.

**Benefits:** Your participation will help community college administrators better understand the post-traditional student experience in developmental classes and how institutions might better support their growth, development, and ultimate credential acquisition.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions or ethical concerns about this study, do not hesitate to email me at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu) or call me at (914) 570.4807. You may also contact my faculty mentor, Dr. Katherine Aquino, PhD., at St. John's University, 8000 Utopia Pkwy, Queens, NY 11429, or at [czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu).

**Student Researcher:**

Pamela V. Eatman - Skinner, Doctoral Student,  
St. John's University, The School of Education, Queens, NY,  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
at [pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu)

Signatures for consent to participate in the study

I am enclosing a copy of my IRB approval and the list of focus questions I will ask throughout the interview. Below you will find an Informed Consent Form for your signature. Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of this consent form and your willingness to participate. Remember that you can withdraw your participation in this study without penalty.

**Name and Signature of Participant:**

Please print your name (*Participant*)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature of *Student Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature of *Student Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signatures for permission to be audio and video recorded during interview sessions

If you have read and understood the study’s purpose, the procedures to be followed, the benefits, risks, and confidentiality clause, and have given consent ***for your interview sessions to be audio and video recorded as participants in this research study***, please sign below to complete this consent form. You may review these recordings and request that all or any part of the recordings is destroyed or excluded. *Your signature below indicates that you agree to be audio and video recorded during the interviews for this study, with the understanding that you are free to withdraw your participation at any point without penalty. If you withdraw, all recordings of the interviews will be destroyed.*

*Check both boxes*

I consent to be audio recorded during the interviews for this study.

I consent to be video recorded during the interviews for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant:

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please print your name: (*Participant*)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Researcher:

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Principal Investigator**  
Pamela V. Eatman-Skinner  
pamela.eatman18@my.stjohns.edu

**Doctoral Mentor**  
Dr. Katherine Aquino Ph.D.  
[czadoaqk@stjohns.edu](mailto:czadoaqk@stjohns.edu)

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## APPENDIX G: PTRLs INTERVIEW PROTOCOL MATRIX



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

### **Script before the interview:**

*Before we begin, I'd like to thank you for participating in this interview. I believe this work is meaningful, and having you share will provide valuable information that will help so many other students to have a better chance at completing college. So, thank you on behalf of every student whose academic journey will be made better because of your efforts.*

***Say: The title of my research study is:***

### **HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:**

**A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POST-TRADITIONAL REMEDIAL LEARNERS AND THEIR DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS**

*As I mentioned, my study seeks to understand how Post-Traditional Students who need to complete remedial classes return to academia, find a sense of belonging and achieve their desired success.*

***(Discuss the term Post-Traditional Remedial Learner PTRL)***

*This study also seeks to understand how community colleges, particularly college administrators and faculty, can provide the support that removes some of the institutional barriers that can stunt students' growth. Our interview today will last approximately one hour. I will ask you about yourself, your decision to attend a community college, the remediation journey, and how you have (or have not) felt a sense of belonging in the larger community. Please feel relaxed. There are no trick questions, and if at any time you do not feel comfortable with answering a question, please know that you are free to decline without penalty of any kind.*

***{Review Components of Consent Form with Participant}***

*During our initial discussion, you completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission to record our conversation. Are you still okay with me recording us today?*

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

*If yes:* Thank you. Please let me know if, at any point, you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record (confidential).

*If not:* Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our discussion today.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions?

*If so:* Discuss questions.

Note: If any question/s (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, please feel free to ask them at any time. I'm happy to answer your questions.

**Sample Follow-up Questions:**

1. Can you elaborate a little more on that?
2. You talked previously about...can you tell me more about that?
3. How did that make you feel?
4. What do you mean by that?
5. What did you think when that happened?

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

**RQ 1:** As it relates to student's academic journey, what are the experiences and perceptions of Post-S tudents completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 2:** What motivates administrators and faculty to work with and support Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 3:** What are the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

*Say: Is there anything else that you'd like to share? Did I miss anything?*

*Say: After transcribing my interview notes, I will share them with you to ensure I capture your thoughts and voice as accurately as possible.*

*Say: Thank you again for this interview. You added tremendously to my research.*

**APPENDIX H: ADMINISTRATORS' FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**



School of Education  
 Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
 (Fall 2022)

<p>Pre-Focus Group Discourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>During our initial discussion, you completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission to record our conversation. Are you still okay with me recording us today? Yes _____ No _____</i></li> <li>○ <i>If yes: Thank you. Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.</i></li> <li>○ <i>If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our discussion today.</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Signing and Clarification of Documents: Informed Consent Form &amp; Signature Request</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Explication of Focus Group Format / Answer Questions:</i></li> </ul>
<p>Focus Group</p>
<p>1. Introductions: Building Rapport:</p>
<p>2. Share Introductory Script:</p>
<p>3. Begin the Focus Group:</p>
<p>4. Conclude Focus Group at the scheduled time:</p>
<p>5. Thank participants for their contributions to the study:</p>

## APPENDIX I: ADMINISTRATORS' FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL MATRIX



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

### **Script for the FOCUS GROUP:**

*Hello everyone. I hope all is well. I want to begin by thanking you again for your participation in this focus group. I know you have so many important responsibilities on campus, and I don't take it for granted that you've agreed to share your time with me today.*

*I believe this research is essential for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and that it can have a lasting impact on how we engage this student demographic on our campus. Most of all, our conversation will lead to more robust discussions campus-wide. So, I genuinely thank you!*

***Say: The title of my research study is:***

### **HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POST-TRADITIONAL REMEDIAL LEARNERS AND THEIR DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS**

***(Briefly Define Post-Traditional Learners)***

*As I mentioned, my research study seeks to understand how post-traditional remedial learners (in particular, return to academia, find a sense of belonging, and achieve the success they desire). This study also seeks to understand how community colleges, particularly college administrators and faculty, can provide the kinds of support that remove some of the institutional barriers that often negatively impact the successful outcomes of students.*

*Our focus group today will last approximately ninety minutes, during which I will ask us to candidly share our thoughts on the PTRLs and how we can better serve them. Please feel free to share candidly; what is said in this room remains here, and your candor is coveted, or else this process won't yield the type of knowledge that will benefit our work. So, I thank you in advance.*

Before we begin the focus group, do you have any questions? *If so: Discuss questions.*

Note: If any question/s (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, please feel free to ask them at any time. I'm happy to answer your questions.

**Sample Follow-up Questions:**

1. Can you elaborate a little more on that?
2. You talked previously about....can you tell me more about that?
3. How did that make you feel?
4. What do you mean by that?
5. What did you think when that happened?

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

**RQ 1:** As it relates to student’s academic journey, what are the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 2:** What motivates administrators and faculty to work with and support Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 3:** What are the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
What comes to mind when you think about post-traditional learners?	X		
What are your perceptions about the post-traditional remedial learner experience?	X		X
What should remedial education (i.e., curriculum, credit structure, modality) ‘look like’, specifically for PTRLs in community colleges?	X		X
How does race, age and student identity impact the post-traditional remedial learner?	X	X	X
What classroom practices may be implemented to specifically motivate		X	X

successful remedial outcomes for PTRLs? What are some of the challenges?			
How do you know when a student feels a 'sense of belonging' in your classroom environment and how can that be developed?			X
What are two things that faculty members can do to motivate themselves to work more effectively with PTRLs?		X	
How do you serve PTRLs differently than the more traditional student?	X		
How does the perception of faculty members impact student interactions?	X	X	
How has sense of belonging impacted been impacted by COVID 19?			X
How does the curriculum specifically address the lived experiences of PTLs?			X
What do you see as some of the major hurdles to PTRLs success in remedial coursework? What can be done about it?			X
How do the most recent changes to remediation in community college impact PTRLs	X		X
What institutional practices will help PTRL students to persist through the first year of college?		X	X

**APPENDIX J: INSTRUCTOR AND ADVISOR FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**



School of Education  
 Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
 (Fall 2022)

Pre-Focus Group Discourse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>During our initial discussion, you completed a consent form indicating that I have your permission to record our conversation. Are you still okay with me recording us today? Yes_____ No_____</i></li> <li>○ <i>If yes: Thank you. Please let me know if, at any point, you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.</i></li> <li>○ <i>If not: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our discussion today.</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Signing and Clarification of Documents: Informed Consent Form &amp; Signature Request</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Explication of Focus Group Format / Answer Questions:</i></li> </ul>
Focus Group
1. Introductions: Building Rapport:
2. Share Introductory Script:
3. Begin the Focus Group:
4. Conclude Focus Group at the scheduled time:
5. Thank participants for their contributions to the study:

## APPENDIX K: INSTRUCTOR AND ADVISOR FOCUS GROUP MATRIX



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

### **Script for the FOCUS GROUP:**

*Hello everyone; I hope all is well. I want to begin by thanking you again for your participation in this focus group. I know you have so many important responsibilities on campus, and I don't take it for granted that you've agreed to share your time with me today.*

*This research is essential for Post-Traditional Remedial Learners and can have a lasting impact on how we engage this student demographic on our campus. Most of all, our conversation will lead to more robust discussions campus-wide. So, I genuinely thank you!*

***Say: The title of my research study is:***

### **HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:**

**A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POST-TRADITIONAL REMEDIAL LEARNERS AND THEIR DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS**

***(Briefly Define Post-Traditional Learners)***

*As I mentioned, my research study seeks to understand how Post-Traditional Remedial learners (in particular, return to academia, find a sense of belonging, and achieve the success they desire). This study also seeks to understand how community colleges, particularly college administrators and faculty, can provide support that removes some institutional barriers that often negatively impact students' successful outcomes.*

*Our focus group today will last approximately ninety minutes, during which I will ask us to candidly share our thoughts on the PTRLs and how we can better serve them. Please feel free to share candidly; what is said in this room remains here, and your candor is coveted, or else this process won't yield the knowledge that will benefit our work. So, I thank you in advance.*

Before we begin the focus group, do you have any questions? *If so: Discuss questions.*

Note: If any question/s (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, please feel free to ask them at any time. I'm happy to answer your questions.

**Sample Follow-up Questions:**

1. Can you elaborate a little more on that?
2. You talked previously about....can you tell me more about that?
3. How did that make you feel?
4. What do you mean by that?
5. What did you think when that happened?

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

**RQ 1:** As it relates to student's academic journey, what are the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 2:** What motivates administrators and faculty to work with and support Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

**RQ 3:** What are the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional Students completing remedial coursework?

	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
What comes to mind when you think about Post-Traditional Learners?	X		
What are your perceptions about the Post-Traditional Remedial Learner experience?	X		X
What audacious goals can the college envision that can enhance outcomes for PTRLs at community college?		X	X
			X

What should remedial education for adult learners look like, specifically in community colleges?			
What should administrators focus on to advance the development of remedial students on campus?		X	
How does race, age and the student's status impact their engagement in the classroom setting?	X	X	X
What institutional practices may be implemented to motivate successful remedial outcomes for PTRLs?		X	
What institutional reforms may be enacted to address remedial students' persistence in college?			X
What role should administrators play in engaging and motivating PTRLs?		X	
What 'new' needs for PTRLs have arisen in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic and how might administrators motivate students toward deeper levels of campus engagement, despite them?		X	X
What audacious goals might the executive leadership achieve to enhance the sense of belonging of PTRLs on campus?		X	X
What 3 offerings can be provided to PTRLs within the community college setting to ease the enrollment, matriculation, and persistence conundrum?		X	
How might technology be used to enhance the college's work with PTRLs			X
			X

What threats and opportunities for PTRLS exist for the community colleges because of the current state of remediation?			
How can community colleges offer a more tailor-made experience for PTRLS?		X	X
What institutional barriers may impact the PTRLS experience?			X
What challenges do administrators face while serving PTRLS?			X
Are the remedial offerings meeting the needs of the students as they move towards matriculation and graduation? What ideas can you offer in this regard?		X	

## APPENDIX L: RESEARCH QUESTIONS WITH FINDINGS



School of Education

Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership

(Fall 2022)

Research Questions	Findings
1. As it relates to students' academic journey, what are the experiences and perceptions of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?	
1. What motivates administrators and faculty to work with and support Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?	
2. What are the central issues and potential challenges for the success of Post-Traditional students completing remedial coursework?	

**APPENDIX M: RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR PTRL'S**



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

Note: Recruitment emails will be sent to PTRLs (Student Participants)

First Email Distributed Subject: Calling all Adult Learners: We need to hear from you!

Email Send Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond by: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Recipients: Provide email addresses below

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.. - 12

Dear Scholar,

Hi, my name is Pamela Eatman – Skinner, and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership. This email invites you to participate in a research study designed to learn more about adult learners and how community colleges can better support students toward their graduating goals. The perspectives of adult learners have often been omitted from the literature, and we hope to listen to your very important points of view and address that omission in the literature.

We appreciate your open and honest responses. This is critical to the success of the research. Your responses will be kept confidential, and only the researcher will see the compiled results. Know that your input will be taken very seriously and will help inform policies and practices for current and future students.

Thank you again for your participation. Your voice makes a difference!

**Sincerely,**

*Pamela Eatman - Skinner*  
**Pamela V. Eatman - Skinner**

**APPENDIX N: RECRUITMENT EMAIL FOR ACADEMIC PERSONNEL**



School of Education  
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership  
(Fall 2022)

Note: Recruitment emails will be sent to Executive Leadership, Administrators, Faculty Members/ Remedial Instructors, and Advisors.

First Email Distributed Subject: College Educational Leaders who serve Adult Remedial Students: We need to hear from you!

Email Send Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond by: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Educational Leader,

Greetings, my name is Pamela Eatman – Skinner, and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership. This email invites you to participate in a focus group designed to learn more about adult learners and how community colleges can better support students' sense of belonging and, ultimately, their goal of college graduation.

The Post-Traditional Remedial Learner (commonly known as the Non-Traditional Student) in higher education has been historically absent from much of the literature. To this end, creating spaces for research and meaningful discussion will substantiate the discourse. Within this context, I would greatly appreciate your candid participation. Hearing your voice and perspective is critical to the success of the research on this topic and, most importantly, this underserved student demographic.

Please know that all discussions and responses will be confidential, and only the researcher will see the compiled results. Thank you again for considering being a part of the research study. Your input will be taken very seriously and will help inform policies and practices for current and future students.

Yours in Education,

*Pamela Eatman - Skinner*  
Pamela V. Eatman - Skinner

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