POSTSECONDARY EXPERIENCES OF TITLE I HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WHO WERE AT-RISK STUDENTS OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Raquel A. Grindley

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of high school graduates who were at-risk students (ARS) of low socioeconomic status (SES) who completed the state standards-based college and career readiness (CCR) curriculum at Title I high schools. For the purposes of this study, ARS of low SES were generally defined as students of low-income households with at least one parents failing to complete high school or a postsecondary degree program. CCR is defined as the level of preparedness for postsecondary schools and workforce settings. A Title I school is defined as a school that receives additional federal funding for the purpose of equalizing education for students of low SES. The theory that guided this study was Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which proposes that human development is affected by a combination of influences from different areas of an individual's ecological environment. This study occurred in the state of Georgia with 10 participants. Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and written response prompts, which were then analyzed and synthesized into similar themes experienced by the participants. Three major themes and eight subthemes were identified from the analysis of the participant experiences. The major themes were preparedness for college, preparedness for the workforce, and high school environment. Additional research is required to continue exploring the impact of the CCR curriculum of Title I high schools on the postsecondary outcomes of students of low SES, particularly in relation to their preparedness for postsecondary settings and financial literacy.

Keywords: postsecondary readiness, at-risk students, Title I schools, ecological theory

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Eva Beatrice Dykes who was a servant of God, English teacher, and the first Black woman in the United States to earn her doctoral degree. She was an unwavering proponent of the power of education, particularly for children of low-SES, and she spent over half a century working within school systems of traditionally disadvantaged communities so those students could have a better chance at achieving postsecondary success in college and workforce settings.

I dedicate this dissertation to my ancestors who guided me spiritually and reinforced my faith in The Creator at moments when the doctoral journey was most harrowing; I am because they were.

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I attribute all aspects of my success in completing this dissertation to The Creator; without the power of faith driving me forward, completion would not have been possible. This is the greatest feat I have accomplished in my academic and professional life, and I recognize that the power of faith in The Creator underscored every part of my ability to complete my doctoral journey.

I would like to thank my mother Joy for her unwavering support. The completion of this terminal degree would not have been possible without your encouragement and love. Thank you for always routing for my success and believing in my ability to achieve my goals. Thank you to my godfather Dr. Ian Smith for being my first example of excellence in the field of education. You were instrumental in my decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Thank you to my godmother Dr. Grace Anderson, for your sage advice and constant encouragement. I also acknowledge the support and love of my best friends and extended family whose prayers and support were cornerstones of my success in this endeavor. Completing this degree would not have been possible without their collective support; I am eternally grateful to have been blessed with the love of my tribe.

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List of Abbreviations

At-Risk Students (ARS)

College and Career Readiness (CCR)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This phenomenological study was an examination of the postsecondary experiences of Title I high school graduates with low socioeconomic status (SES) who were at risk of dropping out of school. The participants in this study completed standards-based college and career readiness (CCR) curriculum, which was designed to prepare students for life in postsecondary settings and required for graduation from their high school. Chapter One begins with background information on the importance of academic and social skills for the achievement of positive life outcomes in postsecondary settings, and the chapter further explains how factors associated of the participants' SES contributed to the reasons why they were at risk for dropping out of school.

The historical, social, and theoretical context in the participants' provided background information outlines how children of low SES can have stunted cognitive and socioemotional development (Marsh et al., 2020; Rothstein, 2021). Children of this demographic are negatively affected by the conditions of their households, community environments, and schools with high concentrations of these children often attending Title I schools (Kaiser et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020). This historical context of this study reviews the systemic conditions that led to the need for the Title I school initiative. It also reviews reasons why people of low socioeconomic class needed the initiative to help equalize education in their communities. The social context of the phenomenon displayed why understanding the experiences of these individuals would be significant to education reform for this demographic. The theoretical context of this study presented Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecology theory as a basis for the participants' descriptions of the CCR course in their Title I high school setting and the perceived impact of that curriculum and school setting on their outcomes in postsecondary settings. Chapter One concludes with the

study's research questions, definitions of terms that are pertinent to this study, and a summary of the Chapter One's contents.

Background

The expectations, level of guidance, and standards for postsecondary settings are considerably higher than that of schools at the secondary level (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). The lack of CCR is one of the reasons why at-risk students (ARS) of low SES often struggle academically and professionally during their first year after leaving or completing high school (Connolly et al., 2017; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Stevens et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018). Without being appropriately prepared for the change in culture between the high school environment and the environments of postsecondary atmospheres, ARS of low SES struggle to progress through to completion in postsecondary institutions or struggle to achieve gainful employment in professional settings (West et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018).

Historical Context

In its original conception, the Title I federal grant initiative was a provision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and was designed to close the skill gap in reading, writing, and mathematics between children from low-income households, who attended urban or rural school systems, and children from middle-income and high-income households, who attended suburban school systems (Jeffrey, 1978). It is important to note that while income level was the basis for the determination of need for additional funding in schools in low-income communities, the majority of students who attended those schools were found to have low SES, which can incorporate the family's income level as well as their racial, ethnic, or religious classification (Taylor-Robinson et al., 2018).

Historically, Title I schools have been found in communities where disadvantages are associated with income as well as race, ethnicity, and religious affiliation, so disparities in

educational attainment for students of many of those schools can be attributed to these factors (Assari, 2020). The reason for these disparities can be traced to the prejudicial policies in legislation that underscored centuries of residential segregation, which led to the segregation of public schools and the educational inequalities between communities of low SES and those of high SES (Shogren et al., 2018). Although segregation of schools based on race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation was eventually made illegal, the effects of the historical legislations that purposefully disadvantaged certain racial, ethnic, and religious groups are still prevalent, at this writing, as evidenced by the high concentration of this demographic of students in the populations of Title I schools (Shogren et al., 2018). In 2010, educational standards for CCR were adopted by Title I schools to further equalize education, close the achievement gap, and prepare students for college and career spaces regardless of their SES (Desimone et al., 2019; Henry & Stahl, 2017).

CCR of Students of Low SES

One of the most significant events in CCR education in the United States occurred in 2010, with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Desimone et al., 2019; Henry & Stahl, 2017; Tampio, 2018). It was the first development of a nationwide standard for grade school education that included a focus on closing the achievement gap through reforms in CCR (Desimone et al., 2019; Henry & Stahl, 2017; Malin et al., 2017). The purpose of the CCSS was to provide an outline for grade school instruction, in core and elective content areas, that delivered the content knowledge necessary for academic success at the college or career level upon high school graduation (Porter et al, 2011). Participation in the CCSS initiative was optional, so the fact that 86% of the states in the United States accepted the standards, shows widespread intentionality behind a nationwide attempt at better preparing public school students for postsecondary endeavors (Schmidt, 2018).

Given that the CCSS standards have been accepted by 42 states, it is evident that CCR education is a part of the conversation in nationwide curriculum reform for public schools (Desimone et al, 2019; Edgerton & Desimone, 2019; Henry & Stahl, 2017; Schmidt, 2018). The CCSS was supposed to be a comprehensive plan that resulted in the attainment of CCR skills for public school students; however, studies have shown that while the CCSS curriculum is effective for public school students in affluent neighborhoods, it is highly ineffective for ARS of low SES in Title I public schools (Henry & Stahl, 2017; Poshka, 2019; Schmidt, 2018). There is a gap in the literature about the ineffectiveness of the CCSS curriculum on the postsecondary readiness of ARS of low SES (Poshka, 2019). Describing the effects of CCSS-based CCR education through the perspective of the people who have experienced it can better inform school leaders who are making future plans for national CCR reform for ARS of low SES in Title I public schools (Edgerton & Desimone, 2019; Poshka, 2019).

National Reforms for CCR

To supplement the CCSS, the U.S. Department of Education sponsored the National Survey on High School Strategies Designed to Help At-Risk Students Graduate, which gathered information on the prevalence and characteristics of dropout prevention strategies for ARS. ARS of low SES were included as a category of the ARS in this study (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Repetto et al., 2018). The only approach that was found to effectively retain ARS of low SES and prepare this demographic for college and career education was dual enrollment, which allowed students to attend academic and technical courses at the college level while they were still in high school (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago; Repetto et al., 2018; Schmidt, 2018). It was hypothesized that dual enrollment programs were especially necessary for ARS of low SES because the conditions of their households, communities, and available institutions of education

did not adequately support their needs in CCR (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago; Repetto et al., 2018; Schmidt, 2018).

The last 10 years of research on CCR programming in Title I public schools of this country demonstrates that the programming is not effective in preparing ARS of low SES for successful outcomes in postsecondary institutions or for gainful employment in professional settings (Poshka, 2019; Schmidt, 2018). It is quite possible that the dual-enrollment program was more successful than that of the other CCR programs because it gave students the most experience with postsecondary environments while they were still in high school, and because they were socialized into those environments, they were better prepared to transition to postsecondary settings upon high school graduation (An, 2013; Kilgore & Wagner, 2017; Schmidt, 2018).

Social Context

Success in college and career environments requires academic ability as well as an understanding of the social culture of those settings, and without development in both areas, success in these environments is not likely (Martin, 2019). Martin (2019) concluded that noncognitive skills are not content specific, they are applied skills relating to interpersonal and intrapersonal strengths; therefore, even if students are academically strong, without sufficient development in the social graces of professional atmospheres, they are not likely to thrive in college or career settings (Micalizzi et al., 2019; Payne, 1996).

The sociocultural environment of a Title I high school is a unique phenomenon, as is the set of standards that govern the CCR education of this type of school (Martin, 2019). All of the participants of this study were graduates of Title I high school environments, and they were able to describe their unique interpretation of the CCR education that was specific to this type of setting. Understanding the experiences of this group of people can assist in the reform of the

system of CCR education designed for this demographic. Research has shown that the CCR standards for public education in the United States, particularly at the secondary level, has not been effective in preparing its ARS for success in postsecondary institutions or the workforce (Martin, 2019; Micalizzi et al., 2019; Payne, 1996). The social context of this study highlights how one's success in postsecondary settings is, in large part, based on the settings in which they were raised and whether or not habits developed in their ecological system to support successful outcomes in college and professional settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Martin, 2019; Micalizzi et al., 2019).

Social (Soft) Skills as a Determinant for Postsecondary Success

Soft skills, or social skills, are defined as nontechnical competencies associated with an employee's personality, attitude, motivation to work, and work habits (Bolli & Renold, 2017; Chattoraj & Shabnam, 2015; Cooke & Zaby, 2015; Stewart et al., 2016), all of which can be negatively impacted by being raised in a household or community of low SES (Micalizzi et al., 2019; Payne, 1996). Additionally, social skills have shown to be significant determinants of employability because these skills are a large part of job readiness (Bolli & Renold, 2017; Chattoraj & Shabnam, 2015; Harun et al, 2017; MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017; Nisha & Rajasekaran, 2018). The underdevelopment of social skills in students of low SES underscores many of the social challenges they experience when transitioning from high school to postsecondary spaces (Martin, 2019). Even if ARS of low SES achieve academic success, typically this is not enough for these students to thrive in college and career settings if their social skills are undeveloped, which is the normal outcome of living in a household or community of low SES (Martin, 2019; Schmidt, 2018).

Theoretical Context

In many ways, individuals' levels of academic skill correspond to their socioeconomic class because the conditions of the ecological environment determine one's level of access to components necessary for healthy cognitive and social development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Potter & Morris, 2017). Success in postsecondary settings is dependent upon a combination of sufficient academic attainment and social development through appropriate institutional programs and the availability of role models with successful economic outcomes, both of which are disproportionally unavailable in the ecological environment of ARS of low SES (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Lawson et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017; Welsing, 1975, 1991).

CCR Education and Postsecondary Life Outcomes of ARS of Low SES

There is a substantial body of research that addresses the connection between the CCR education of the American public school system and its high school graduates' postsecondary outcomes. The seminal meta-analysis of Evans and Burck (1992) examined 67 studies, the results of which demonstrated that successful transition to college and career settings is inherently related to CCR education experienced at the secondary school level (Curry & Milsom, 2014; Evans & Burck, 1992; Falco & Steen, 2018); therefore, studying the experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who experienced the state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum allows for the documentation of the effects of that curriculum through a first-hand description of how much it impacted this population's readiness for college and workforce settings.

This phenomenological study could assist in extending the existing knowledge regarding the experiences of Title I high school graduates who were all ARS of low SES who completed a CCR curriculum aligned with the state-approved standard for the public school education of high

school students. Researchers who have investigated the issue of CCR programming for ARS of low SES have called for future research that incorporates a clear description of this demographic's experience with CCR and how that experience impacts the individuals' life outcomes (Edgerton & Desimone, 2018; Falco & Steen, 2018; Swail & Perna, 2002). This study can help fill that gap in the literature. The interviews of this study revealed new information about the experiences of Title I high school graduates who completed a standards-aligned CCR curriculum, allowing policy makers to review an unbiased, personal account of postsecondary experiences that they related to that curriculum. It is important to understand how the CCR curriculum administered in Title I high schools is actually affecting the postsecondary life outcomes of ARS of low SES, so, if necessary, associated policies can be changed to ensure ARS of low SES receive an equalized level of support in postsecondary readiness that they need (Edgerton & Desimone, 2018).

Theoretically, the standards-based CCR curriculum in public high schools was designed to facilitate students' smooth transition to postsecondary settings, but it has been found that because the curricular design did not include the specific needs of ARS of low SES, it was not likely that the practical application of this curriculum would result in the desired postsecondary outcomes for that population (Schmidt, 2018). The theoretical underpinnings of this study include Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, which proposed that human development, as an ecological system, and all aspects of that system, affect an individual's maturation and development. This theory relates to the constructs of this research because this study describes how SES is the result of the economic and social conditions of one's community, which includes the household and the school system. The postsecondary outcomes of children of low SES are negatively impacted by the disparaging conditions found in their ecological environment, so they need additional instructional and socioemotional school-based supports to

effectively regulate behaviors and habits they developed as a result of the conditions of their SES (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Falco & Steen, 2018; Lawson et al., 2017; Pastor & Tur, 2020). If Title I high schools are designed to equalize education for these students, and the CCR curriculum administered in these high school is supposed to prepare students for college and workforce settings, then it is important to study that area of the ecological environment of ARS of low SES so the impact of these factors on their postsecondary outcomes can be properly understood (Falco & Steen, 2018; Pastor & Tur, 2020).

Problem Statement

The current set of standards for the CCR curriculum in public high schools has not been successful for the life outcomes of the majority of ARS of low SES (Kaiser et al., 2017; Lawson et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017). The current research on education policy speaks to the gap in the literature about the ill effects of the existing public high school CCR curriculum and its failure to address the specific needs of ARS of low SES (Desimone et al., 2019; Edgerton & Desimone, 2018). The conditions of the ecological system of ARS of low SES impact the likelihood of these children completing programs in postsecondary institutions or attaining gainful employment, which perpetuates the cycle of generational disenfranchisement (Kaiser et al., 2017; Lawson et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017). If the state standards of public education were designed to provide a level of instruction that produces college or career-ready graduates, then the life outcomes of the graduates of that educational system should reflect success in postsecondary and workforce settings upon high school graduation. Historically, for ARS of low SES, this has not been the case (Evans & Burck, 1992; Falco & Steen, 2018; Henry & Stahl, 2017).

The issue of CCR for ARS of low SES needs to be explored because situational and institutional barriers that impact their cognitive and socioemotional development create the need

for more effective CCR instruction than what is provided in the existing national and state standards and in Title I high schools (Babineau, 2018; McLeigh et al., 2018; Yavuz et al., 2019). This phenomenological study describes the experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed a CCR high school curriculum so that policymakers can tailor existing CCR instructional methods to better suit the needs of this population.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES and who completed the state standard-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. In *The Glossary of Education Reform*, (2013) ARS of low SES were generally defined as students who were likely to drop out of school because of circumstances associated with socioeconomic disadvantage.

I provide an unbiased description of the postsecondary life outcomes of graduates who were ARS of low SES in relation to the CCR education they received at Title I high schools. This study was driven by my interest in highlighting the importance of including the reflections and suggestions of this population's experiences with the Title I high school CCR curriculum so policy makers could be better informed about the effectiveness of that curriculum for ARS of low SES who attend Title I high schools.

Significance of the Study

This study's significance was examined through theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives. Each of these perspectives underpinned my understanding of the problem and the significance of this study to a larger community of education reformers. The goal was to share the stories of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who experienced a CCR curriculum at Title I high schools and to describe the level at which they felt prepared for

postsecondary success in relation to those factors. I hope that the findings of this study spur any necessary changes to the CCR curriculum in Title I high schools.

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of this transcendental phenomenological study was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, which underscores the importance of considering the systemic issues that negatively impact the inner workings of households and communities in poverty, and how issues within each level of the ecological environment of ARS of low SES impede a child's ability to develop cognitively and socially. Based on this ideology, it stands to reason that, given their condition, ARS of low SES are behind the learning curve before they even enter school because their home and community environments do not support the level of cognitive or social development necessary for success in postsecondary settings (Duttweiler, 1995; Payne, 1996; Uleanya & Omoniyi, 2019). Such a notion emphasizes the significance of describing how an appropriate high school environment can have enough positive influence on a child of low SES that negative habits and behaviors caused by other areas of their ecological system are offset (Falco & Steen, 2018; Lawson et al., 2017; Pastor & Tur, 2020).

Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory relates with current research on the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES because the characteristics of these students' microsystem, defined as household and community environments, undercut their ability to develop academically and socially, resulting in a higher likelihood of failure to succeed in postsecondary environments if they do not receive adequate interventions (Falco & Steen, 2018; Lawson et al., 2017; Pastor & Tur, 2020). Therefore, investigating their experiences will help stakeholders explore the effectiveness of public schools' CCR education from a more personalized point of view.

Empirical Significance

There is limited investigation as to the lived experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES in reference to CCR education (Desimone et al., 2019; Edgerton & Desimone, 2019; Falco & Steen, 2018; Schmidt, 2018), which warranted the need for this study. While there is literature about the effects of a CCR education, there are few studies that investigate the issue from the perspective of Title I high school graduates who experienced that curriculum. Moustakas's (1994) seven steps analysis strategy was used to find meanings, themes, and significant statements within the context of the participants' shared experiences. The descriptions of their experiences focused on their postsecondary outcomes since graduating high school and, from their perspective, the ways in which the CCR education received at their Title I high schools impacted those outcomes.

Using Moustakas's (1994) seven steps provided a trustworthy basis by which I could analyze the data, heightening the study's trustworthiness, and allowing for other researchers in the field to replicate or build upon this study (Creswell, 2013). The conditions of this study's setting, as well as the SES of the population from which the participants came, were sampled and applicable to other Title I high schools with similar student populations (Falco & Steen, 2018; Payne, 1996). All students of low SES experience conditions that impact their readiness for college and career settings that are related to their socioeconomic designation (Payne, 1996). The empirical significance of studying this population was that highlighting the shared experiences of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged conditions provided a foundation for the argument regarding how critical a CCR education is to the successful postsecondary outcomes of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES (Falco & Steen, 2018; Payne, 1996; Wiley et al., 2010; Wyatt et al., 2011).

Practical Significance

The knowledge generated from studying this population in this particular setting was applicable to the wider scale of Title I high school graduates who were at risk for dropping out of school because of factors related to their SES. Throughout the United States, ARS of low SES who attend Title I high schools experience the phenomenon of a standards-based CCR curriculum, and this study's participants can give voice to those individuals who never we able to share their perspective on its effectiveness (Desimone et al., 2019; Edgerton & Desimone, 2019; Falco & Steen, 2018). This study can assist in the reform of CCR programming for ARS of low SES in Title I high schools because the participants of the study represented the population of student for whom achievement-gap-closing reforms are designed (Pastor & Tur, 2020). ARS of low SES experience academic and social challenges that are specific to factors associated with their SES. Investigating their postsecondary outcomes can help educators of this demographic gauge the effectiveness of the CCR curriculum that is currently in place in Title I high schools (Falco & Steen, 2018; Payne, 1996; Schmidt, 2018).

Research Questions

The research questions of this study emerged from the problem and purpose statements. The phenomenological questions were created in a manner that provided clear and concrete descriptions of the phenomenon's social meanings and personal significance to the participants. The research of this study was developed through a central question and two sub-questions.

Central Research Question

> What are the shared, postsecondary experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum?

Sub-Question One

What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in postsecondary institutions?

Sub-Question Two

What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in workforce settings?

Definitions

1. *ARS (at-risk students* – learners who face circumstances that could jeopardize their ability to complete school (*The Glossary of Education Reform*, 2013).
2. *Career readiness* – the acquired education and social abilities necessary for employment in a professional setting (Conley, 2018).
3. *CCR (college and career readiness) curriculum* – leveled course track for grade school education intended to provide instruction on the content knowledge and skills deemed essential for success in university, college, community-college programs, and professional settings (*The Glossary of Education Reform*, 2013).
4. *College readiness* – the educational discipline, academic success, and social behaviors a student should acquire, prior to attending college, that are necessary for successful completion of a college degree (Conley, 2018).
5. *High SES* – social standing and class of an individual or group measured as a combination of race or ethnicity, education, income, and occupation and classified as people who are usually not of color and are financially stable (Concepts, 2015).
6. *Low SES* – social standing and class of an individual or group measured as a combination of race or ethnicity, education, income, and occupation classified as people who are usually of color and are low-income individuals or living in poverty (Concepts, 2015).

7. *Postsecondary settings* – any atmosphere experienced after secondary school, including, but not limited to college, trade school, certificate programs, the military, and workforce environments (Concepts, 2015).
8. *Standards-based* – systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating their understanding or mastery of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education (*The Glossary of Education Reform*, 2017).
9. *Title I* – federal funding program created to establish educational equality between underprivileged and privileged students (Grant & Arnold, 2015).
10. *Title I school* – any institution of public education that accepts funds from the Title I federal program created to establish educational equality between underprivileged and privileged students (Grant & Arnold, 2015).

Summary

At the time of this study, there were neither national nor state education policies in high school graduation requirements that included the mastery of processes associated with access or acceptance to postsecondary institutions or the instruction of "soft skills," or the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills necessary to succeed in workforce settings (Falco & Steen, 2018). Without this form of education, students from households without a legacy of completing postsecondary programs or achieving gainful employment are ill prepared for the academic and social adjustments necessary to succeed in institutions of higher education or in professional settings (Fogel et al., 2020; Gerra et al., 2020). This study addressed the effectiveness of the standards-based CCR curriculum in Title I high schools that serve students labeled as at risk for dropping out of school due to factors associated with their socioeconomic condition. This study explored the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES in relation to their Title I high school

education and described how the CCR curriculum of their Title I high school affected their experiences in college and career settings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature explored the effectiveness of the standards-based CCR curriculum of Title I high schools on the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES. The first section of Chapter Two discusses ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) concerning cognitive and social human development, and outlines why consideration of these concepts is necessary when designing effective programming for ARS of low SES. The review of the theoretical framework preceded a synthesis of recent literature that specified the systemic causes for the disparities in educational attainment between people of low SES and people of high SES. It outlines why communities of low SES remain in a position of economic and social disadvantage and links the gaps in academic achievement and gainful employment to the conditions that are specific to their SES.

Synthesis of the related research revealed that students of low SES have cognitive and social deficiencies that result from disadvantages found in their ecological system. Additionally, the literature demonstrated that low SES students' cognitive and social deficiencies are not appropriately addressed nor remedied by the standards-based CCR curriculum found in public schools in communities of low SES. The related literature describes the systemic issues that created the conditions for ARS and why the existing standard of CCR education in Title I high schools may be ineffective for the children in communities of low SES. Chapter Two presents examples of the appropriate administration of CCR education for ARS of low SES and provides evidence of an appropriate CCR curriculum that can offset negative influences found in the ecological system of communities of low SES. Chapter Two concludes with a description of education malpractice and the possible future legal implications for public schools that continue to use a standards-based CCR curriculum that has been proven ineffective for the demographic

of students to whom it is delivered. In the end, a gap in the literature relating to CCR education of ARS of low SES is identified, and evidence that substantiates a viable need for this study is presented.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the different aspects of an individual's ecological system and the impact of the environments within that system on their life outcomes begins with highlighting the systemic issues that are known to cause cognitive and social deficiencies (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Falco & Steen, 2018; Lawson et al., 2017; Pastor & Tur, 2020). Furthermore, it is possible to remedy those deficiencies through an appropriate curriculum in a high-quality secondary school system using interventions specifically tailored to the needs of this demographic of the ARS (Pastor & Tur, 2020). The theoretical context of this study centered on the ecological system of ARS of low SES and the influences within their ecological system that harm cognitive and social development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). The circumstances of the ecological system of people of low SES create the need for additional academic and socioemotional support because the conditions of their household and community environments are economically and socially disadvantaged and increase the likelihood of them dropping out of school (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Falco & Steen, 2018; Lawson et al., 2017; Pastor & Tur, 2020). Furthermore, a CCR curriculum that explicitly targets issues caused by poor ecological conditions can provide instruction on behaviors and the habits necessary for high school graduation and desired postsecondary outcomes (Fogel et al., 2020; Holmes et al., 2019; Kilgore & Wagner, 2017).

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) proposes that human development is an entire ecological system composed of five subsystems that affect an individual's maturation and development. Bronfenbrenner (1992) argued that positively charged subsystems heighten an

individual's social knowledge, ability to learn and problem-solve, and interest in self-exploration. The opposite is the actuality for negatively charged subsystems. Bronfenbrenner (1992) described the ecological system's five subsystems as the micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono systems. He explained that each subsystem affects human maturation, and it has lifelong effects on cognitive and social development.

This study sought to uncover the details about the impact of the participants' ecological systems on their cognitive and social development and how that phenomenon affected their ability to thrive in postsecondary settings. Ecological systems theory is the basis for this study because the conditions the participants' households and community environments, including the Title I high school they attended, are the result of their SES, which effected their readiness for postsecondary settings. Synthesis of the theoretical framework and corresponding literature support the concept that a supportive school environment and appropriate CCR curriculum can assist in reversing negative influences commonly found in the ecological systems of households and communities of low SES (Falco & Steen, 2018; Lawson et al., 2017; Pastor & Tur, 2020).

Ecological Systems Theory: ARS and Their Life Outcomes

From its conception, the political and economic systems of the United States began with prejudicial practices that disproportionately favored specific communities of people while others were purposely disadvantaged, all based on a prejudicial social class system (Hines, 2021; Welsing, 1975, 1991). The Hussar et al. (2020) findings concur with the Groos et al. (2018) 10-year review of literature on the effects of structural disadvantage within specific American communities, concluding that prejudicial practices based on race, ethnicity, and religion caused the maladapted infrastructures in communities of low SES, which resulted in lifelong impediments in educational attainment, financial security, and other necessary components for successful life outcomes for the people of these communities.

The characteristics of the participants' micro subsystem, defined as the household and community environments, undercut their ability to develop academically and socially, contributing to their children's ARS and lowering the likelihood of high school graduation and success in college and career settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Tudge & Rosa, 2020; van Zwieten et al., 2021). Theoretically, when the influences of the microsystem are compromised, development in all other subsystems is compromised because all other subsystems are affected by the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Consequently, given that the school environment is a significant part of the microsystem, healthy influences from this part of the microsystem can offset negative influences of other areas of the microsystem, heightening the likelihood of academic and postsecondary success (Crawford et al., 2020).

For centuries in the United States prejudicial practices in the exo subsystem, defined as local laws, neighborhood resources, social services, and mass media, created the present-day gap in educational attainment and economic opportunity between communities of low SES and high SES (Groos et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b). The same is accurate at the macro subsystem level, defined by Bronfenbrenner (1992) as the cultural and political ideologies that govern an individual's environment. In communities of low SES, the trickle-down effects of the prejudicial ideologies that govern the exo and macro subsystem include discriminatory policing, low-quality education, and limited opportunities for gainful employment (Ward, 2018). These practices create a host of issues that have both direct and indirect impacts on the cognitive development and social maturation of the people of these communities (Crimmins et al., 2018; Farah, 2018; Merçon et al., 2020; Reason, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b . Children raised in communities of low SES are profoundly impacted by these conditions, evidenced by a collective disruption in their chronosystem, defined as milestone moments that profoundly impact an individual's cognitive and social development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1996).

This study expanded upon Bronfenbrenner's (1996) ecological systems theory by highlighting ways that the traumatic conditions in communities of low SES negatively affect the cognitive and social development, academic performance, and, later, employability of the people of these communities (Lecheile et al, 2020; Micalizzi et al., 2019). When considering the cyclical relationship between academic attainment and employability, it is likely that exploring the academic experiences of people from communities of low SES can highlight the ways in which the quality of education available to these communities affects their postsecondary outcomes. The cognitive and social supports necessary for students of low SES is vastly different from that of children of high SES, so it is necessary to explore the experiences of the people of this demographic to understand the types of school settings and education reforms that are most appropriate and effective for their specific needs.

Related Literature

Even though ARS of low SES are not in direct contact with some of the domains of their ecological subsystems, the economic, political, and social influences therein create issues that perpetuate conditions that lead to at-risk status (Lawson et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017; Tudge & Rosa, 2019). Residential neighborhoods influence educational attainment through socialization, institutional resources, and collective efficacy (Howell, 2019). The lack of collective educational attainment in communities of low SES leads to collective low-income attainment and low collective self-efficacy (Auspurg et al., 2019; Bronfenbrenner, 1976; 1996; X, 1963). Living in a constant state of economic and social disadvantage and being raised by a household of people who have suffered the same conditions, creates a cyclical achievement gap (Owens, 2018, 2019). Investigation of this issue, through the lens of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), began by establishing the connection between the conditions of an

ecological environment and the cognitive and socioemotional development of the children of that environment (Merçon et al., 2020).

Ecological System of ARS of Low SES

Due to their oppressed condition, ARS of low SES are significantly behind their same-aged peers before entering school because their surrounding environments do not support the level of cognitive or social development necessary for academic success or success in postsecondary settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; van Zwieten, 2021). In communities of low SES, the development of ARS status was the result of a system of prejudicial practices in housing, education, legislation, and criminal justice. These conditions created the economic and social disparities that adversely influence the cognitive and social development of the people of that socioeconomic class (O'Connor et al., 2019, 2020; van Zwieten et al., 2021; Zhang, 2020a, 2020b).

The determinants for one's SES include one's financial status, race, ethnicity, and religion, and this same SES can be transferred to one's children (Hines et al., 2020; Kivimäki et al., 2020; Welsing, 1975, 1991). Therefore, to plan successful educational reformations for American children of low SES, it is necessary to understand the historical prejudices of the ruling class in this country and how those prejudices prevent the present-day success or growth of people in communities of low SES. (Hines, 2021; Hines et al., 2021; Kivimäki et al., 2020). Welsing's (1975, 1991) seminal work postulated that it is necessary to acknowledge the prejudices of a system in order to understand the behavioral phenomena that develop as a result of that system. Welsing's studies focused on the effects of prejudice on the economic and social constructs of communities of low SES, highlighting the disparaging differences between their life outcomes and those of people of high SES. Such an exploration is relative to the participants in this study because all of the participants came from communities of low SES and experienced

cognitive and social underdevelopment as a result of their SES.

Historical Disruptions in the Ecological System of People of Low SES

In large part, ARS of low SES experience developmental deficits that result from being raised in communities whose infrastructures of human services and education have been pointedly and purposefully underdeveloped over long periods of time (Auspurg et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2019; Howell, 2019; Michney & Winling, 2019). Prejudicial practices in the housing and banking industries reinforced prejudicial practices in education, known as educational redlining (Berkovec et al., 2018; Bloch & Phillips, 2021; 2018; Burke & Schwalbach, 2021). The practice of denying some students enrollment into a preferred public school site if the student's address of record was not in the zone of the preferred school site assisted in widening the achievement gap between students of high SES and those of low SES (Auspurg et al., 2019; Burke & Schwalbach, 2021; Evans et al., 2019; Welsing, 1975). Title I schools are located in communities of low SES, which are economically and socially underprivileged, and the services offered within those schools are substandard compared to those located in communities of high SES (Auspurg et al., 2019; Berman et al., 2018; Burke & Schwalbach, 2021; Kitchen, 2017).

Black Americans of low SES are a prime example of a group of people who have been targeted by generations of political and economic campaigns fueled by prejudicial ideologies, beginning with centuries of American chattel slavery, followed by decades of Black codes and laws that evolved into the convict-leasing system, which laid the foundation for today's industrial prison complex (Eppard et al., 2020; Hammad, 2019). The treatment of this group of Americans presents a prime example of how prejudicial government policies (a macrosystem) create unhealthy conditions in the household and neighborhoods (a microsystem), that can negatively affect the community as a whole for generations (Eppard et al., 2020; Hammad,

2019). Given the aforementioned practices that led to their SES, Black Americans of low SES are overwhelmingly represented at all levels of the juvenile and adult prison systems, which is an outcome of the centuries-long economic and social oppression of these communities (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Eppard et al., 2020; Mitchell, 2018). In most cases, the result of these circumstances is a broken family structure and the cognitive and social underdevelopment of the children therein (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Hinton et al., 2018). In communities of low SES, a lack of parental presence is the foremost cause of underdevelopment in a child's cognitive and social abilities. The standards of education for the American public school system do not address these conditions, so children raised in communities of low SES have the highest rates of being at risk of dropping out of school before high school graduation (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Hinton et al., 2018).

The afflicted conditions of communities of low SES were exacerbated by legislative policies in the 1980s and 1990s, like the war on drugs and the tough-on-crime campaigns (Calnitsky & Gonalons-Pons, 2021; Eppard et al., 2020; Mason, 2020; Mitchell, 2018). These crusades encouraged biased policing in communities of low SES, resulting in the United States' prison boom in the 2000s, where people of low SES, particularly Black Americans of low SES, were overwhelmingly represented (Mitchell, 2018). Children with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents are often deemed as criminals simply because of their parents' condition, and they are consigned to marginalized treatment before they are born, which heightens their likelihood of being at risk for dropping out of school (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Hinton et al., 2018; Novak, 2019). This is a crucial issue in communities of low SES because it is one of the reasons why some ARS of low SES have the highest public school dropout rates. The cognitive and social habits and behaviors that mold an individual's life outcomes are determined primarily by their ecological environment. Therefore, the purposeful marginalization of communities of

low SES, which are molded by dysfunctional social constructs within the families who live in those communities, adversely affect those children's academic ability and social maturation, inhibiting their success in postsecondary settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Choi et al., 2018; Merçon et al., 2020; Reason, 2020; van Zwieten, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b).

The Effect of SES on Life Outcomes

The most powerful predictors of an individual's life outcomes are the parents' educational and occupational achievements; thus, if a child is born to parents of low SES, it is likely to expect the same life outcomes for that child when the conditions of this community, and prejudicial systems that created those conditions in their community, have not changed (Reason, 2020; van Zwieten, 2021; von Stumm et al., 2018, 2020). Economic status and racial demographics play such a significant role in educational attainment and occupational outcomes that both were controlling factors for America's national projections of educational statistics (Hussar & Bailey, 2011; Hussar et al., 2020). Comparing Hussar and Bailey's (2011) National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) 2011 ten-year projection of education statistics to the Hussar et al. (2020) NCES 2020 condition of education report substantiates the link between SES and educational attainment. The projections of 2011 matched the actual condition of educational attainment in 2020, with only control for SES and gender, which would explain why the disparaging numbers in high school graduation rates and postsecondary degree completion in communities of low SES parallel the disadvantaged condition of the households and communities in which these students were raised (Hussar & Bailey, 2011; Hussar et al., 2020). Furthermore, through the comparison of the 2011 projections report and the 2020 conditions report, there was a paralleled relationship between occupational attainment and educational attainment, where communities of low SES had low occupational attainment as well as low

educational attainment, while communities of high SES had high occupational attainment as well as high educational attainment (Hussar & Bailey, 2011; Hussar et al., 2020).

Between 2011 and 2020, there was little to no change reported in the systemic conditions that affected the communities included in the NCES projections, which would explain why the outcomes in 2020 mirrored the statistics projected in 2011. Both reports showed that students of low SES had the highest dropout rates in high school and college in addition to the highest rates of unemployment, regardless of trade school or college degree completion (Hussar & Bailey, 2011; Hussar et al., 2020). The Hussar et al. (2020) study results suggested that when there is no change in the systemic conditions of a community, there is no change in the educational attainment of the people who live in that community. Under then lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, the study of the postsecondary outcomes of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES could provide a viable basis for understanding the ways in which an effective school-based CCR curriculum can offset conditions created by economically and socially maladapted ecological systems.

The Microsystem of ARS of Low SES

The impact of low SES on a child's development can be seen through the microsystem that is composed of the individual's family, neighbors, and grade schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The environments of this system reflect the individual's initial learning and are the individual's first point of reference about the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The factors that characterize the microsystem of students of low SES have such a negative impact on their executive functions that they need additional academic support to adequately perform in school and keep up with their peers of high SES (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). Defined as the fundamental skills necessary for learning, working, and managing daily life, adequate executive functioning is

necessary for success in postsecondary settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1996; Fogel et al., 2020; Hackman et al., 2015).

Hackman et al. (2015) explored the features of childhood experience that influence the relationship between children's low SES and the underdevelopment of their executive functions, concluding that the ratio of family income to needs was associated with children's development of working memory. The underdevelopment of working memory in the formative years contributes to the low high school and college completion rates of many children of this socioeconomic class (Fogel et al., 2020; Hackman et al., 2015). Thus, programs that seek to prepare ARS of low SES for postsecondary environments need to create supports that offset the negative influences of their households' low-income-to-needs ratio, as this issue can cause disparities in healthy cognitive development, academic achievement, and appropriate behavior (Chan et al.; 2018; de Souza Morais et al., 2021; Fogel et al., 2020; Hackman et al., 2015).

Household Environments of Children of Low SES

Children of low SES need effective school environments that address traumas specific to the households of their socioeconomic condition. The characteristics of the culture of households that endure low-income-to-needs ratios include instability, violence, hunger and malnourishment, unemployment, physical and mental health issues, drug addiction, homelessness, crowded housing, incarceration, low-quality education, limited knowledge bases, and death (Holmes et al., 2019; Payne, 2019). These conditions are highly prevalent in households of low SES, and they are known to create barriers to social development. However, CCR programming targeted to the specific needs of this demographic can offset the negative influences routinely found in this type of ecological system (Lecheile et al., 2020; Micalizzi et al., 2019).

The available literature on the ecological system of child development speaks to the importance of considering the systemic issues that negatively affect the inner workings of

households of low SES (Murray et al., 202). Marsh et al. (2020) defined household chaos as the level of disorganization or environmental confusion in the home and emphasized its association with a range of child and family outcomes. The disorganization and instability of households of low SES are, in large part, created by the economic instability of the household, which can be traced to the economic disadvantage of this demographic's macrosystem and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1993; Murray et al., 2021). This type of household atmosphere is common for ARS of low SES and negatively affects children's ability to develop cognitively and socially (Bronfenbrenner, 1976,1993; Murray et al., 2021; Tudge & Rosa, 2020; Uleanya & Omoniyi, 2019). There is a direct link between children's household environment and their cognitive and social development; therefore, children who reside in chaotic households are less likely to achieve desirable life outcomes, particularly in postsecondary settings (Condon & Sadler, 2019; Marsh et al., 2020). Children who reside in chaotic households become at risk for school failure because their households do not provide the necessary support for appropriate development of the executive functions. Homes of low SES are least likely to produce the environment necessary for healthy development because of the chaos experienced in these homes (Lawson et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017; Solyali & Celenk, 2020).

ARS Parental Involvement

An additional symptom of households of low SES is the lack of parental involvement, in part created by this country's purposeful marginalization of communities of low SES (Solyali & Celenk, 2020; Tudge & Rosa, 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Many of the adverse conditions in households of ARS of low SES is due to the lack of parental involvement (Wang et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2018). Wang et al. (2020) studied the effects of parental involvement on student achievement and mental health. The study included high school students of varying SES, and they included descriptions of styles of parenting to each specific SES. The findings revealed

diametrically opposing results between the levels parental involvement of parents of high SES and parents of low SES (Wang, 2020). Wang et al. concluded that for parents of low SES, cultural beliefs regarding the role of the family in education, the meaning and goals of education, and the diversity of parents' experiences with schools were much lower than parents of high SES, which explained the dramatic variations in academic success rates between the children of those two groups (Wang et al., 2020). Parents of low SES showed markedly less involvement in their children's education, which could explain this demographic's low academic performance in grade school and low completion rates in secondary school and postsecondary programs (Wang et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2018).

Hackman et al. (2015) concluded that the ratio of family income to needs was associated with children's healthy cognitive development, academic achievement, and appropriate behavior. Low-family-income-to-needs severely hinders performance by a child's 54-month milestone, and lack of parental involvement at the child's school is a significant factor in the academic and social underdevelopment of youth of low SES (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Hackman et al., 2015). Furthermore, lower maternal education worsens performance in the working memory by the time the child is in the first grade (Bailey, 2018; Hackman et al., 2015). These issues in the microsystem can cause irreparable damage to the chronosystem because constant exposure to negative influences in the home and neighborhood environments inevitably result in missed milestones (Bailey et al., 2021; Bronfenbrenner, 1996; Fogel et al., 2020; Gerra et al., 2020). When students experience years of recurring issues of this nature, by the time they get to high school, they are years behind their affluent peers regarding academic success, social functioning, and postsecondary readiness (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

Allport et al. (2018) found that paternal involvement in children's lives elevates child outcomes, including improved cognition, behavior, mental health, and eating habits. Children,

particularly adolescents, who do not have a solid parental presence tend to display unhealthy behavior patterns and are more likely to drop out of school (Marttila-Tornio et al., 2021). These statistics worsen when a healthy father figure is missing from the household (Kim & Glassgow, 2018; Marttila-Tornio et al., 2021). It is important to note that in the United States, many fathers of ARS of low SES are absent because of the effects of structural prejudice in communities of low SES (Assari et al., 2018). Decades of targeted campaigns, supported by government agencies, successfully removed fathers from these homes, mainly through over-policing and mass incarceration (Fornili, 2018; Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018; Welsing, 1975, 1991). These conditions had lasting effects on the development of generations of children in neighborhoods of low SES, which is evident in these children's low success rates in grade school and postsecondary programs, high rates of unemployment, and the repetition of broken family structures (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018; Welsing, 1975, 1991). In households of ARS of low SES, a lack of paternal involvement contributes to their underdevelopment in cognitive and social skills (Allport et el., 2018; Kim & Glassgow, 2018).

Malnutrition in Households of Low SES

As a result of economic disadvantage and lacking parental presence, children of households of low SES often have poor eating habits, which negatively influence their academic performance and social development (Pastor & Tur, 2020). Children who are hungry or at risk of being hungry are twice as likely to have impaired functioning, and food insufficiency is closely associated with poor academic functioning in low-income children (Pastor & Tur, 2020). Taras (2005) categorized four areas of child nutrition: nutrient and micronutrient intake, iron deficiency and supplementation, food insufficiency, and the effect of eating breakfast. Taras's (2005) findings concluded that children of low SES often suffer from malnutrition and that this issue could be a contributing factor to the widening achievement gap between affluent children

and those who live in poverty (Pastor & Tur, 2020; Taras, 2005). Further investigation (Pastor & Tur, 2020) concurred with Taras's (2005) findings that providing malnourished children with a healthy intake of nutrients and daily breakfast yields positive results in academic performance. When children of low SES receive regular doses of the recommended levels of zinc and other micronutrients, there is a significant improvement in fine and gross motor skills, sustained attention, and capacity for concept formation and abstract reasoning (Pastor & Tur, 2020). When treated for iron deficiencies and anemia, there was a marked improvement in mental functioning, especially for girls (Pastor & Tur, 2020).

Children with low SES suffer from inadequate diet and eating habits, so they are even more inclined to have low academic success (Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Pastor & Tur, 2020). Grantham-McGregor and Smith (2020) revealed that experiences of hunger resulted in aggressive and anxious behavior, and showed malnutrition adversely affects students' ability to develop healthy social skills. Students who were hungry or at risk for hunger displayed higher levels of hyperactivity, absenteeism, and tardiness than non-hungry children (Chen et al., 2019; Grantham-McGregor & Smith, 2020; Pastor & Tur, 2020). Consequently, once children who are hungry or at risk of being hungry receive breakfast regularly, they show significant improvements in academic performance (Grantham-McGregor & Smith, 2020; Pastor & Tur, 2020). With these issues of malnutrition impeding healthy cognitive and social development through their adolescent years, there is less likelihood of these students developing the skills necessary to survive in or complete a high school or postsecondary program (Pastor & Tur, 2020).

Circumventing the Effects of Low SES Household Conditions Through Effective CCR

Over the last decade, continuously undesirable statistics on the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES spurred a national upswing in interest and discussion about CCR among

researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. In the field of education, this interest led to an industry-wide acknowledgment of the role academic, social, and financial preparation plays in shaping outcomes in postsecondary environments and the fact that this type of instruction is not often present in schools in communities of low SES (Gilstrap, 2020; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). As a result, the most recent education policy changes increased the emphasis on high school graduates' readiness for postsecondary settings (Desimone et al., 2019). Children in households of low SES often suffer the effects of parents having minimal to nonexistent involvement, which creates an opportunity for school staff to have a heightened positive influence on these students' academic and social development (Gilstrap, 2020; Orrock & Clark, 2018). In-school initiatives that have proven to circumvent negative influences from parents or guardians include a targeted CCR curriculum, longer school hours, smaller class sizes, one-on-one tutoring, and an expanded extracurricular program (Gilstrap, 2020; Moshidi & Jusoh, 2020; Orrock & Clark, 2018). With more time in school and more positive influences within this area of the microsystem, children of low SES are more likely to graduate from high school and succeed in postsecondary settings because the influence of strong role models and a supportive school environment makes up for the lack of parental involvement at home (Gilstrap, 2020; Moshidi & Jusoh, 2020). Furthermore, even if other aspects of these children's ecological system remained compromised, the positive influence of a positive, supportive school setting could be so significant that they were still capable of achieving academic success and desired postsecondary outcomes (Gilstrap, 2020; Moshidi & Jusoh, 2020; Orrock & Clark, 2018).

Impact of School Environment and CCR Programs for ARS of Low SES

The majority of influences in the microsystem of ARS of low SES do not support healthy cognitive and social development, which is necessary for success in postsecondary settings; therefore, the role of the school-based initiatives, particularly a high-quality, standards-based

CCR curriculum, provides resources that are significant to success in postsecondary settings (Falco & Steen, 2018; Paolini, 2019). Improving the quality of these students' school environment is critical to closing the achievement gap because these positive influences offset the unhealthy conditioning of the household environments of children in communities of low SES (Hines et al., 2017; McMahon et al., 2017).

Supportive school staff has a significant influence on the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES, improving these students' development of academic skills, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation to be successful in college and career atmospheres (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Gross-Manos et al., 2020; Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). These findings support the notion that once an individual is intrinsically motivated, they can independently avoid deterrents to their success because the intrinsic motivators will assist in helping them persist toward the goal, even if those deterrents exist within their households or communities (Falco & Steen, 2018; Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Paolini, 2019; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Intrinsic motivators are developed in an effective school environment, overriding the effects of extrinsic factors that demotivate or stop children's developmental progression (Paolini, 2019).

This current study explored the participants' experiences with their Title I high school's environment in addition to the CCR curriculum and described the impact of that experience on their intrinsic motivation to succeed academically and professionally. The description of these experiences could assist professionals in this field with the improvement of the level at which the current standards-based CCR curriculum and Title I high school environment could heighten the success of ARS of low SES in postsecondary settings.

Outcomes of Effective CCR Curriculum for ARS

Effective CCR curriculum improves the academic achievement and social development of ARS when the programs and associated school staff compensate for the disadvantage experienced in their overall ecosystems (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Gross-Manos et al., 2020; Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Moreover, effective CCR programs increase retention, self-efficacy, academic achievement, and persistence in students considered at risk for dropping out during their high school tenure (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Mokher et al., 2018). ARS of low SES who experienced high-quality school programming and supportive school staff showed marked elevations in cognitive and social development necessary for success in college and career settings (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Mokher et al., 2018; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Appropriate CCR programming in schools that serve ARS of low SES, like Title I high schools, is highly effective in filling the academic and social gaps caused by the lack of academic and social resources in the students' homes and communities (Falco & Steen, 2018; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Additionally, effective instruction specific to the needs of ARS of low SES may not change the prejudicial American power structure that leads to their disadvantaged macrosystem; however, it can educate them on the prejudices therein and teach them how to navigate those prejudices in postsecondary atmospheres (Gilstrap, 2020; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020; Paolini, 2019).

Macrosystem of ARS of Low SES

The macrosystem is the outermost layer of an individual's environment, so it indirectly influences all other layers of subsystems, characterizing the patterns of ideology and behavior to which the individual identifies and mimics (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1996). Prejudicial practices within the power structures of the macrosystem of people of low SES make it so that those who already suffer from generations of economic, political, and social oppression remain relegated to low SES (DeGruy, 2009; Groos et al., 2018; Merçon et al., 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017).

Therefore, even though ARS of low SES are not in direct contact with the influences of their macrosystem, these economic, political, and social influences create the issues that consign their communities to low SES and perpetuate the economic and political circumstances from which at-risk status arises (Lawson et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2020; Merçon et al., 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017; Tudge & Rosa, 2019). Furthermore, because these systemic issues affect every aspect of the lives of ARS of low SES throughout their entire life span, this current study is pertinent to education reformers who wish to understand the effects of the school environment and CCR curriculum on ARS ability to circumvent pitfalls in postsecondary atmospheres created by prejudicial policies (Marsh et al., 2020; Merçon et al., 2020).

Systemic Prejudice and Life Outcomes of ARS of Low SES

Over policing and mass incarceration have had the most severe impact on ARS of low SES, and the spillover effects of this issue are prevalent in the contemporary class stratification of the American public education system (Fornili, 2018; Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018). Economic and educational disadvantages are drivers of criminal behavior, and these issues contribute to why students of low SES are more likely to drop out of school and engage in criminal behavior (Flynn, 2020; Hinton et al., 2018). Additionally, issues unique to communities of low SES, like over policing and longer prison sentences, make these families vulnerable to furthered financial distress and broken family structures (Adams et al., 2020). The mass incarceration of generations of parents of low SES and the placement of their children into the foster care system compounds the issues of household chaos and underdeveloped cognitive and social skills, wearing away at community cohesion and heightening community and family dysfunction (Adams et al., 2020).

As demonstrated by the documented disparities in postsecondary outcomes between people of low SES and people of high SES, the youth of communities of low SES are repeatedly exposed to physical and emotional violence, so they are more likely to commit violent acts

throughout their lives (Simckes et al., 2021). The behaviors developed as a consequence of the micro- and macro systems reduce children's ability to attain education and, later, gainful employment (Simckes et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2016). The Simckes et al. (2021) study of the long-term community effects of traumas developed as a result of the over policing of communities of low SES concluded that these issues are critical factors in the deterioration of the educational and economic structures of these communities. The social contexts of their neighborhood and the prejudicial government policies and policing agencies that influence those social contexts significantly impact youth of low SES (McCrea et al., 2019). Issues like state-sanctioned use of special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams to demolish homes, and the targeted use of excessive and repetitive violence from police agencies, expose the youth of communities of low SES to constant disorder in addition to physical and emotional upheaval (McCrea, 2019; Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020; Simckes, 2021). Such issues of government-sanctioned violence in the communities of low SES are mirrored in these communities' school systems that report the highest and most extreme levels of violence and disciplinary action for students. Just like in the criminal justice system, for the same infractions, individuals of low SES are more severely punished than their counterparts of high SES (Adams et al., 2020; Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020).

Disciplinary Practices in Schools of Communities of Low SES

One of the leading causes of cognitive and social underdevelopment of ARS of low SES is the excessive disciplinary practice within the public school system, which mirror the over policing of their communities (Gaston et al., 2020). The disciplinary procedures and practices of schools that serve children of low SES are highly biased against these children compared to that of schools that serve children of high SES (Jackson, 2021; Pfister et al., 2021). As early as preschool, zero-tolerance policies govern children's educational experience in schools in low

SES neighborhoods, showing longer suspensions and increased expulsions, stunting these children's cognitive and social development, and causing them to miss critical academic benchmarks (Blake et al., 2017; Huang & Cornell, 2017, 2018). Barrett et al. (2018) explored disparities in school suspensions and expulsions between people of low SES and high SES and found that children of low SES are more prone to suspensions than their counterparts of high SES. Barrett et al. (2018) also found that school staff intentional discrimination was the cause of over discipline and harsher consequences for students of low SES compared to children of high SES who received far less punishment with far more lenient consequences for the same infractions. The study also revealed that these disparities were present throughout school districts, across schools, and at all grade levels (Barrett et al., 2018).

Another issue associated with discriminatory bias against children of low SES is the unconscious racial bias of teachers and administrators, which is a contributing factor to these children's suspension and expulsion from school at the highest rates of all groups of children (Barrett et al., 2018). The detrimental impact of these suspensions is the hindrance of academic growth based solely on the races and ethnicities of this specific group, which worsens the racial disparities in academic achievement (Morris & Perry, 2016; Stitt, 2021). Compared to other groups, students of low SES experience the highest rates of exclusionary disciplinary practices, and many of the out-of-school suspensions given to these students are the result of racial biases from school staff (Barrett et al., 2018; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). The work of Barrett et al. (2018) concurred with Passero's (2018) conclusion that SES is a factor in disciplinary measures in public schools, agreeing that the higher the income level of a child's family, the fewer out-of-school suspensions experienced by the child, regardless of the frequency or seriousness of the infraction.

Passero's (2018) research on the relationship between educational attainment and discriminatory discipline policies found that the overwhelming representation of children of low SES is due to the historically prejudicial regimes of the United States. Passero (2018) found that increased suspensions and expulsions are the products of schools' zero-tolerance discipline policies, which are often in public schools in high-poverty neighborhoods like Title I schools. These policies disrupt students' access to education and contribute to the high dropout rates of students who were repeatedly suspended and for more extended periods of time (Barrett et al., 2018; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017; Passero, 2018).

School Quality, Academic Achievement, and Income Attainment

The available data on the postsecondary outcomes of people of low SES demonstrates parallels between SES, educational attainment, and gainful employment (Bailey et al., 2021; Hussar & Bailey, 2011; Hussar et al., 2020). The issues that lead to the academic achievement gap, including severe disciplinary practices in schools, lacking parental involvement, and an uneven distribution of funds and resources, are exclusive to communities of low SES because they are derivatives of America's historically prejudicial regimes (Bailey et al., 2021; Clarke, 1978; Hussar & Bailey, 2011; Hussar et al., 2020; Welsing, 1975, 1991). Likewise, the disparities in educational attainment in traditionally marginalized communities were the precursor to the gap in income attainment between people of low SES and people of high SES (Bailey et al., 2021; Groos et al., 2018; Hussar & Bailey, 2011; Hussar et al., 2020; Namin, 2020; Welsing, 1975, 1991).

Children of low SES are more likely to attend schools in high-poverty districts with less rigorous curriculums, fewer resources, and teachers who expect less of them academically than they would expect of similarly situated students of high SES (Hussar et al., 2020). On average, Title I schools see the highest turnover in principal and assistant principals, and this high

mobility is the highest in schools that serve communities of low SES (Winters et al., 2021). Without a consistent administration to spur retention in the teachers, counselors, and other school staff, it is impossible to sustain the school-wide initiatives necessary for effective academic and social development of the students (Hochschild, 2021). While there may be staff members who do stay at the school despite the challenge of administrative stability, their individual efforts may spur some positive change, but not enough to ignite high performance throughout the entire school, nor effectively address the needs of ARS of low SES (Hochschild, 2021).

The unremedied issues within the education systems of communities of low SES explains why, for generations, these communities have had the highest incarceration rates and unemployment rates (Bailey et al., 2021; Clarke, 1978; Hussar et al., 2020; Loesch, 2018; Namin, 2020; Welsing, 1975, 1991). Additionally, Loesch (2018) highlighted that in the United States, socioeconomic class and opportunities for academic and economic success are inextricably linked. Therefore, children of low SES are disproportionately affected by decreased access to quality education and higher education, lowering their likelihood of attaining gainful employment (Groos et al., 2018; Owens & Candipan, 2019; Welsing, 1991; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Bias in the school environment of communities of low SES undermines the educational experience of the students who attend those schools. Students attending schools in communities of low SES, like Title I schools, have to endure low school quality at all grade levels (Barrett et al., 2018; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Loesch, 2018; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). Students' socioeconomic backgrounds correlate with their educational attainment and educational attainment significantly influences their future earning power and SES, which, in turn, directly influences their life outcomes and that of their offspring (Barrett et al., 2018; Loesch, 2018). The outcomes of ARS of low SES correlate with their parents' low earning power and low SES if

there is no change in household conditions or school environment (Barrett et al., 2018; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Loesch, 2018; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017).

Overview of Standards-Based CCR Education

Effective CCR programming and a supportive school environment can create supports that interrupt the cycle of poverty in communities of low SES. Arguably, the gap in income attainment, created by the gap in education attainment, is the result of ineffective CCR curriculums in high-poverty school districts (Barrett et al., 2018; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Established by the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, the CCSS is a nationally accepted set of guidelines for grade school instruction in college- and career-level skills (Poshka, 2019). High-quality school environments with an effective CCR improve the academic achievement and social development of ARS of low SES because these programs provide access to the education and opportunities necessary to engage positively with postsecondary settings (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Gross-Manos et al., 2020; Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Effective high school CCR programs increase retention, self-efficacy, academic improvements, and persistence in students considered at risk during their high school tenure (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017; Mokher et al., 2018; Rosenbaum et al., 2017), so the description of this lived experience can help deepen understanding about this population concerning the academic, social, and cultural effectiveness of the CCR curriculum and the Title I high school environment, as demonstrated by ARS postsecondary outcomes.

CCR Education, Cultural Responsiveness, and ARS Outcomes

The ability to speak the language of college and career atmospheres is a skill necessary for success in such settings, and an effective CCR curriculum will develop those necessary linguistic skills through positive social conditioning that compensates for the cognitive and social underdevelopment that occurs in households and communities of low SES (Daniel et al., 2019; Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019). For ARS of low SES, cultural responsiveness is a significant

factor in the effectiveness of any educational initiative designed for this population, especially in Title I schools (Dari et al., 2021; Wilcox et al., 2018). Experts in the field of ARS education agree that one way for students of low SES to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage is to learn CCR skills during high school, and this will allow for success in postsecondary institutions and the workforce (Bal, 2018; Castellano et al., 2017). Investigating the experiences of high school graduates that were ARS of low SES regarding their perceptions of culturally responsive education is vital to gauging the effectiveness of the education initiatives designed to target issues specifically associated with this population (Bal, 2018). An examination of school-wide practices regarding the education of ARS of low SES in Title I high schools contributes to this field of study because such studies increase knowledge around effective, school-based CCR initiatives for this population (Bal, 2018; Hines et al., 2019, 2020).

This current phenomenological study aims to address the question of cultural responsiveness as it relates to the effectiveness of a school's environment and CCR curriculum through the description of the participants' high school experiences. Daniel et al. (2019) investigated the effects of teachers who did not reflect the culture of the SES of the students they taught, concluding that the most effective educational programming for ARS of low SES includes school staff who understand the historical, cultural, and dialectical aspects of these students' economic and social condition. Plausibly, being educated by school staff who survived the same or similar conditions of SES strengthens students' self-efficacy, heightening intrinsic interest in developing the skills necessary for success in postsecondary settings (Daniel et al., 2019).

Legal Implications of an Ineffective CCR Education

Schools with Title I status receive extra resources and funds for the purpose of equalizing education for children from communities of low SES (Gilley & Aranda, 2019). The additional

financial support for these schools and the adherence to standards-based CCR curriculum is supposed to establish educational equality between underprivileged and privileged students and result in underprivileged students' readiness for college and workforce settings (Gilley & Aranda, 2019; Grant & Arnold, 2015). Therefore, there could be legal implications for schools that accept funds for additional support and require its students to complete a standards-based CCR curriculum but do not provide an education or environment that results in successful postsecondary outcomes (Calderon, 2018; Young, 2020).

The U.S. Department of Education mandates that all public schools have challenging and clear standards of achievement and accountability for all children, in addition to showing effective strategies for reaching those standards (Schmidt, 2018). The CCSS provide the outline for the curriculum that culminates in a CCR graduate, so if I high school fails to adequately prepare its students for the academic and social expectations of college and career settings, the school failed to uphold its expected duty of care (Teh & Russo, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that high schools that receive Title I resources are expected to provide an educational curriculum and environment that leads to an equitable educational experience, and the outcome of the administration of a standards-based CCR curriculum should be graduates that are college or workforce ready (English et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2021; United States Government Accountability Office, 2018).

Educational Malpractice and ARS

The seminal work of Coleman (1966) and the research on status attainment tradition based on the work of Blau and Duncan (1967), Hauser (1969), and Neilson (2018) concluded that familial disadvantage plays a role in the intergenerational transmission of inequality, but that familial disadvantage can change through educational access and achievement. Therefore, using the CCSS as a basis for a workable standard of education, it can be argued that a school is liable

for its graduates' inability to succeed in college and career settings if it lacks the courses and instructional practices necessary to appropriately prepare its students for that level of success (Neilson, 2018)

These concepts raise issues for future implications on education malpractice in Title I high schools because a school could be held accountable for accepting additional funds for equalizing education, but failing to deliver on that educational equalization, especially if the curriculum of the school is based on a nationally accepted set of educational standards (Calderon, 2018; Teh & Russo, 2018; Young, 2020). Therefore, graduates at a Title I high school who completed a standards-based CCR curriculum should display college and workforce readiness upon graduation; but this has not been the case for many ARS of low SES (Leung et al., 2021; Poshka, 2019). If a school has granted a diploma to an individual but has failed to adequately prepare that individual for the academic and social aspects of postsecondary settings, then the school could allegedly be negligent and legally charged with educational malpractice (Young, 2020).

Related Cases: Educational Malpractice

Several court cases were especially relevant in the study of educational malpractice as it pertains to students of low SES (Young, 2020). Although most lawsuits against public school systems rule in the defendants' favor, there are documented lawsuits against schools for knowingly granting diplomas to students who had not acquired the skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary settings (Calderon, 2018; Young, 2020). *Peter W. v. San Francisco Unified School District* (1976) (Harris III, 1976) was one of the first documented lawsuits for educational malpractice, and at the time, there was no nationally accepted standard of education and, therefore, no workable rule of measure. Because of this national situation, the judge ruled in favor of the school because there was no official standard of education at that time. For Title I

high schools that follow a standards-based curriculum that is supposed to culminate in CCR, there is a stronger case for educational malpractice when the graduates of those schools are not actually college and workforce ready, which highlights the importance of understanding the shared academic experiences that affect the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES who graduated from those schools (Young, 2020).

Educational malpractice cases in the past such as *Donohue v. Copiague*, 1979 ruled in favor of the schools because there were no workable rule of care for grade school education like there is in the fields of law and medicine (Harris III, 1979); however, with the advent of the CCSS in 2010, there are official standards of education that outline how students should reach the goal of being CCR by the time they graduate from high school. Furthermore, standards for education have been established in every state in the United States, so every state presently has a workable rule of care for grade school education. Therefore, any public school that fails to educate students appropriately, but allows them to graduate with a high school diploma, may be liable for educational malpractice (Young, 2020). This current study revealed details about the effects of a Title I high school's standards-based CCR curriculum on its graduates' postsecondary outcomes, which can act as a basis for the discussion of educational malpractice in Title I high schools.

Passed in 1998, Proposition 227 was a California ballot proposition that specified a standard for teaching students who were Limited English Proficient (LEP) (McField, 2008), causing a substantial shift in the concept of a workable rule of care in the field of education. According to Proposition 227, a school can be subject to a lawsuit of educational malpractice if its educators willfully and repeatedly failed to provide instruction that met the needs of LEP students (The Legislative Analyst's Office, 1998). Proposition 227 created a legal basis for parents to sue a public school that did not provide an appropriate standard of care for their

children's education, similar to the CCSS implemented in 2010 to be a quantifiable standard for grade school education. Established in 2010, the CCSS is the national set of standards for education that provides a sound basis for students to pursue lawsuits in educational malpractice against elementary and secondary schools that failed to deliver an adequate education, as outlined by the CCSS (Young, 2020).

Forty-one states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the CCSS as their standard for elementary and secondary education (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Thus, there is validity to lawsuits from students whose state implemented the CCSS as their official standard but delivered substandard education. Experts in the field of educational malpractice agree that there should be more research about the experiences of students with the standards-based CCR curriculum, as well as their outcomes as a result of that curriculum, in order to describe if schools that serve ARS of low SES are effective, or if the schools are engaging in educational malpractice (Calderon, 2018; Young, 2020).

Summary

Under the context of CCR, this current study sought to ascertain the participants' feelings about their preparedness for college and career settings and the effect of their Title I high school's standards-based CCR curriculum on their achievement of successful postsecondary outcomes. There are gaps in the literature regarding the educational experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES and the effect of the standards-based CCR curriculum on their postsecondary outcomes (Falco & Steen, 2018; Hung et al., 2019). What is currently known in the field of study on ARS of low SES is that they need additional educational support and resources to close the achievement gap between them and their peers of high SES (Falco & Steen, 2018; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Gross-Manos et al., 2020; Mokher et

al., 2018; Rosenbaum et al. 2017). What needs to be studied are the personal accounts of the shared experiences of these individuals while they attended Title I high schools and how effectively the CCR curriculum of those high schools aligned with the requirements of the college and workforce life (Falco & Steen, 2018; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Gross-Manos et al., 2020; Rosenbaum et al. 2017).

Children of low SES, which is due to systemic conditions, experience an inverse proximal process where the instruments of their development are negatively charged and lead to disruptions in their cognitive and social development, producing dysfunctional behavior and reduced competency (Merçon & Vargas et al., 2020). In many ways, individuals' level of academic skill corresponds to their socioeconomic class because the conditions of their ecological environment determine their access to the resources necessary for healthy cognitive and social development (Potter & Morris, 2017). Describing their shared experience with the phenomenon can provide pertinent insight for educational reform that could only be gained through understanding this demographics' firsthand experience (Gilstrap, 2020).

Further, there are limitations in the available literature about Title I high school graduates of low SES, their perception of their high school's CCR curriculum, and if it addressed their need for culturally responsive instruction (Bal, 2018). This study assists in filling the gaps of understanding between the academic experiences of graduates who were ARS of low SES and if lessons from their Title I high school's CCR curriculum translated into their adult lives. Theoretically, the aim of CCR education is to prepare students for college and workforce settings. By understanding the real-life postsecondary outcomes of graduates who were ARS of low SES concerning their CCR education, their lived experiences could inform reforms for this population (Murray et al., 2021). The practical value of this study is its ability to improve

curriculum design and instructional practice for ARS of low SES in Title I high schools and supplement the literature on effective reform for this population (Sanchez et al., 2018).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed a state standards-based, CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. Studying the effect of a high school's CCR curriculum can add to the research that influences policies that govern the kinds of CCR content required in Title I public high schools. Chapter Three highlighted the study's procedures and research design. It is a presentation of an unbiased analysis of the collected data and describes the postsecondary experiences of the individuals who experienced a standards-based CCR curriculum in Title I high schools.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because this research was an exploration of the shared experiences of high school graduates, who were ARS of low SES, to fully describe the essence of their experiences with their Title I high school's CCR curriculum (Creswell, 2013). The interpretive process of qualitative research enabled the exploration of the unique experiences of these individuals of low SES who were at risk for failure in high school because of that SES, but they still earned a high school diploma upon completion of the standards-based CCR curriculum. The interpretive practices of this research design allowed for the examination of multiple meanings for these graduates who were formerly at risk of dropping out of school because of the issues associated with their low SES. The varied meanings uncovered by this study allowed for an unbiased interpretation of the participants' experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenological Approach

A phenomenological approach was preferred for this study because the postsecondary experiences of the high school graduate candidates who were ARS is a unique phenomenon, and the study of this population could provide important insights into education reform initiatives for this demographic. A phenomenological approach allowed for the gathering of descriptive data, which described the relationship between the graduates' experiences with their high school CCR curriculum and their ability to achieve successful postsecondary outcomes in college and career settings (Creswell, 2013). The nature of this unique group, Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES, is a phenomenon. The graduates' secondary and postsecondary experiences were vastly different from their peers of middle or high SES. A phenomenological approach allowed for the gathering of data about the descriptions of the high school graduates' experiences concerning the Title I high school CCR curriculum they completed and their outcomes in college and career settings (Creswell, 2013). As expressed by Moustakas (1994), personal perceptions guide the components that make meaning of the world; therefore, this phenomenological study collected data to make meaning of the effectiveness of a standards-based Title I high school CCR curriculum from the perspectives of the graduates who shared that experience. This inquiry sought to understand the human experiences of students in Title I high schools to explore this phenomenon and how it was experienced and perceived by the individuals who lived through the phenomenological event (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental Approach

The transcendental approach was chosen for this study because I wanted to provide detailed descriptions of the participants' shared experiences, emphasizing their intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a dynamic underlying of the phenomenon they experienced. It provided an understanding of the particular perceptions, feelings, and thoughts

evoked in the participants' consciousness about the experienced (Moustakas, 1994), such as being a graduate of a Title I high school who was at-risk for dropping out, but who still graduated once they completed the high school CCR curriculum. To ensure fidelity of the transcendental nature of this study, I bracketed out my own experiences, opinions, and assumptions, so my past knowledge was not engaged in the recording or describing the participants' telling of their shared experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the shared, postsecondary experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum?

Sub-Question One

What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in postsecondary institutions?

Sub-Question Two

What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in workforce settings?

Setting and Participants

Based on the study's objective and the characteristics required of participants, the study used purposeful sampling to ensure the recording of the most genuine experiences of the phenomenon. The use of criterion sampling allowed for the selection of participants who met the criteria of importance (Patton, 2002), which, in this case, was ARS status while in high school, graduation from a Title I high school, low SES, and the completion of the required CCR curriculum evidenced by high school graduation. The study used critical case sampling to yield

the most important aspects of the participants' experiences about their life outcomes after experiencing the phenomenon, which had significant implications on the curriculum's effectiveness in producing college- or career-ready graduates. The use of a critical case sampling technique allowed me to address the issues of educational and socioeconomic disadvantage from the perspective of the individuals who experienced the effects of the phenomena the CCR curriculum was designed to offset (Moustakas, 1993).

Setting

The setting of this study was in the southern area of a school district in Northwest Georgia. Collectively, the schools in The District had an average annual enrollment of approximately 54,000 students, with an average of 3,500 high school students, per year. The m measure for ARS status is living below the poverty line; therefore, each year, approximately 90% of The District's southern region students fell into that category because of the factors associated with their socioeconomic class and household income (Isaac et al., 2021; Libosada, 2021). This setting was the best choice for this study because the demographic of the graduates from the schools in the district was appropriate for the study. Comparisons between schools in the northern region of The District and those in the southern region demonstrated profound disparities in academic achievement and postsecondary outcomes, which are derivatives of disparities in income attainment and reinforced through residential zoning (Libosada, 2021). Schools data reports on schools in the northern region of The District were in communities of high SES, and the schools reported high levels of emotionally supportive atmospheres, parental involvement, and high-quality education, which explains the high levels of academic achievement and postsecondary readiness in the high school graduates of that geographical region of The District (Isaac at al., 2021; Libosada, 2021). The opposite was reported from the schools in the low-income areas, showing that schools in communities in the southern area of

The District had consistently low high school graduation rates. It seems that the lower a community's SES, the lower the quality of education in the schools of those communities (Isaac et al., 2021; Libosada, 2021).

In the southern region of The District, the high concentration of low-income students qualified many of these institutions for certification as Title I schools. These schools received supplemental funds, support, and resources to assist students with closing the achievement gap created by factors associated with the students' low-income status and residency communities of low SES. The leadership team of The District consisted of 10 people headed by The District Superintendent. It included a Chief of Staff, Chief Equity & Social Justice Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, General Counsel, Chief of Operations, Chief Performance Officer, and Chief of Schools. The southern region of The District was the setting of the study because the student population and educational issues associated with the low SES of that population were akin to other cities nationwide and internationally that have populations of low SES. Thus, a better understanding of the experiences of these participants could be valuable in plans for educational reforms for ARS from similar neighborhoods and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Participants

The participants of this study were high school graduates of low SES who were at risk of dropping out of high school because of factors associated with their SES. These individuals came from underserved communities with histories of economic and social disenfranchisement and, while they were in school, they resided in household and community environments of low SES, which were not likely to support the healthy development of the academic or social skills necessary for postsecondary success (Moshidi & Jusoh, 2020; Potter & Morris, 2017; Solyali & Celenk, 2020; Tudge et al., 2019). Additionally, all the participants attended Title I high schools

that required them to follow a curriculum based on CCR standards in order to graduate. Having earned a diploma through completion of a standards-based CCR curriculum, the graduates of these institutions should have been able to navigate comfortably in postsecondary atmospheres upon graduation from high school. The participants were the first members of their families to earn a high school diploma, complete a college degree, or acquire a position of employment above entry level, so most of their experience with CCR would have happened while completing the CCR curriculum at their Title I high school. There were 10 participants, and they all had to have graduated within the past 12 years (senior classes of 2010–2022) of the conducting of this study.

Researcher Positionality

My experiences with Title I high schools have shown me that it is exceedingly more difficult for children to develop the cognitive and socioemotional skills necessary to thrive in postsecondary settings when they do not have the teachers or resources they need (West et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018). Having 15 years of experience as a high school teacher of ARS of low SES, the majority of which, working in Title I high schools, I have seen the life outcomes of ARS of low SES who did not receive a CCR education specific to the needs of the students of their socioeconomic demographic. I am dissatisfied with the life outcomes of my former students and their life experiences, and I feel it is necessary to conduct research that can help describe the experiences of these youths so future education reforms for students of the same or similar demographics can be tailored more effectively to these students' specific needs.

My position on school reform is that it should include consideration for the opinions of the people for whom the reform is designed. My personal and professional demographic proximity to the students and seeing the same postsecondary outcomes with students of the same demographics in different areas of the United States underscores my motivation to better

understand the experiences of these individuals before and after they experienced a state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. As a community of educators, we are to assist in shaping our society's future citizens; therefore, it is necessary to understand the academic experience of these graduates and how those experiences impacted their ability to thrive in postsecondary settings. These participants' articulation of their experiences is vital to educators' ability to cater to students' specific demographic needs. For these reasons, I chose Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism as the interpretive framework for this study. The underpinnings of Vygotsky's (1979) approach to child development encompassed the idea that the children's cognitive functions develop through their social interactions, which mirrors my assumptions about how the quality of a state-approved standards-based high school CCR curriculum (which includes standards on academic content and social interactions) significantly impacts the life outcomes of individuals who experienced that required curriculum.

Interpretive Framework

The lens through which this study was conducted is Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory because this paradigm supported the idea that students' cognitive development is the result of social interactions. Social constructivism is the collaborative creation of a small culture with shared symbols with shared meanings that impact the actions and thought processes of its participants (Vygotsky, 1978). For ARS of low SES, a school environment can act as a cultural center with shared symbols and meanings to ignite their intrinsically motivated desire for socioeconomic mobility through the CCR curriculum. It provides a basis for the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, which guides this study and proposes that human development is an entire ecological system composed of five subsystems that affect an individual's maturation and development. Based on this theoretical framework, the themes used to code the participants' experiences

included considerations for how their academic experience with the CCR curriculum at their Title I high school impacted their social and academic experiences in postsecondary settings.

Philosophical Assumptions

My philosophical assumptions directed the development of this study's research problem and questions and influenced the gathering of data to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following sections articulate my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions for this study.

Ontological Assumption

For a phenomenological study, I had to be aware of my ontological assumptions and ensure that I accurately report the differences in the participants' experiences rather than my experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). My ontological assumption for this study included awareness of how the participants' points of view consisted of different perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Considering this assumption, I used multiple data sources to gather each participant's descriptions and perspectives of their experiences as a Title I high school graduate of low SES who completed a standards-based CCR curriculum (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data analysis included separating the participants' contrasting comments to reveal themes to understand how they viewed their experiences differently (Moustakas, 1994). My ontological assumption was that when groups of people share the same or similar conditions, like experiencing being an ARS of low SES who graduated from a Title I high school, there is a universal reality shared by all the people of that group, even if they have this experience in different ways. My study describes the experiences of the individual participants who all experienced the disadvantages of low SES, attended a Title I high school, and underwent a standard-based CCR curriculum designed to provide the instruction necessary to thrive in postsecondary settings.

Epistemological Assumption

My epistemological assumptions addressed the ideology that described knowledge as a combination of academic and social intelligence that were supported by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory. My primary epistemological assumption was that the experiences of formerly ARS who completed the Title I public school CCR curriculum were valuable to future reform initiatives for future ARS of low SES. My experience with being a former ARS of low SES, in addition to my years of experience working with this demographic of students, gave me an insider's understanding of this type of student and how to accurately code their descriptions of their experiences with a Title I high school CCR curriculum. While I maintained an objective position as I conducted the study, my personal and professional experiences with the phenomenon assisted in uncovering nuances in this field of study. The achievement gap between children of economically and socially disadvantaged communities and their affluent peers substantiated the need to include these students' experiences in the conversation about educational reform in Title I high schools. Having been a student who was able to close that achievement gap, I had a reliable perspective when I recorded the experiences of others who experienced similar barriers in their education.

Axiological Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that axiological assumptions comprise the values that I brought to this study and how they related to the context and the setting of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My axiological assumptions surrounded my belief that the evidence of an effective CCR curriculum is the life outcomes of the high school graduates who experienced that curriculum. As an experienced teacher who has worked in Title I high schools and college settings, I understood the importance of an effective CCR curriculum to the life outcomes of ARS, especially those of low SES. My intimate understanding of the academic and social

structure of the study's setting allowed me to appropriately code the participants' experiences according to how they felt their experiences in their Title I high school may have been determining factors in their life outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not engage or work with the study's participants directly, so I was able to maintain a neutral position as I retold and coded their experiences (Vagle, 2018). Familiarity with the participants' dialects, cultural norms, and the effects of experiencing the trauma of being a person of low SES allowed me to be culturally responsive and responsible as well as accurate as I described their subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Role

To prevent bias in the interpretation of data and conflicts of interest in data collection, I had no relationship with the participants outside of collecting data on their experience with the phenomenon of focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While I was a teacher in the study's setting, the participants were not my current or former students, and participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Having no authority over the participants allowed for a more comfortable interview atmosphere that encouraged genuine, honest responses to the interview questions (Creswell, 2013). While I had natural assumptions that I brought to the study, I understood how to record an individual's experiences without bias. My familiarity with this population's cultural norms, linguistic accents, and colloquialisms assisted me in collecting genuine data that truly reflected the essence of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon. I understood the dialectical and communicational patterns of the study participants and my proximity as a teacher and resident in their community allowed me to record the participants' experiences accurately. The implications of my proximity to the population in my personal and professional life indicated my intricate knowledge of the community's people and my dedication to highlighting their experiences in a respectful, unbiased way. Knowledge of the population's culture, particularly

the reported life outcomes of high school graduates who experienced economic and social disadvantage associated with their SES, allowed me to analyze the data with an understanding of how the quality of these people's education is a significant contributor to the issues that perpetuate the cycle of low SES.

Procedures

The first step toward completing this study's research was to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Once obtained, purposeful sampling was used to choose the participants: Title I high graduates in the state of Georgia from classes 2010 through 2022. Once all participant recruitment was complete, individual interviews and focus groups were conducted, and the data were triangulated to pinpoint and code the commonalities between the participants' experiences. Responses to written prompts were also reviewed to gather as much data as possible.

Permissions

Before conducting any research, appropriate IRB approval was secured (Appendix A). I identified the chosen setting as feasible and obtained a signed consent form from each participant (Appendix B).

Recruitment Plan

I sent a survey, via mail and email, to the Title I high school alumni of 2010 through 2022 in the northwest region of the state of Georgia and asked for their interest in volunteering to participate in this study, and that the participants were to be chosen based on the participants' availability and survey responses (Creswell, 2013). All graduates who received the survey fit the criteria for this purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). The sampling criteria was that the participants had to be a former ARS of low SES who graduated from a Title I high school after completing the state-standard based CCR curriculum. The sample pool of this study was

approximately 500 graduates; of that sample pool, the first 10 individuals to respond were chosen to begin the study, and interviews were continued with different participants until data saturation was reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that a phenomenological study could have hundreds of participants, but I reached saturation at the 10th participant and began coding the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). All participants were informed about the purpose and intent of the study to ensure adherence to IRB policy (Appendix B) and informed consent (Appendix B). Prior to participating in this study, the participants signed a consent form that outlined the purpose of the research and the procedures that were used to gather data from participants.

Data Collection Plan

According to Creswell (2013), the recommended data collection procedure for a transcendental phenomenological study is Moustakas's (1994) approach because of its systematic steps for the data analysis and guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions of participants' experiences. Surveys were used to recruit a purposeful, criterion-based sample of participants. Then, the 10 participants were interviewed with prompts designed to elicit responses about their experiences in the school's CCR program and the level at which they felt prepared for postsecondary settings as a result of that program. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended this number of participants for this design of the qualitative study.

Recruitment Survey

The volunteers completed the online survey, delivered via email, and I decided what participants would be the best fit after I collected and reviewed the survey answers. The survey had six questions about the volunteers' graduation status, education status, and other demographic information to search who would be best suited for this study. To ensure question quality, I asked colleagues in the field, as well as members of the dissertation committee, to

review the study's instruments and provide feedback that bolster the quality of the intended questions (Appendix D).

Survey Questions

1. Did you graduate from a Title I high school in the southern region of Atlanta, Georgia?
2. If yes, what year?
3. What were your guardians' highest levels of education?
4. Will you make yourself available to participate in a one-on-one interview about your experience with the CCR curriculum at the high school you attended?
5. Are you available to participate in a focus group about your experience with the CCR curriculum at the high school you attended?
6. Are you willing to provide written responses about your experience with the CCR curriculum at the high school you attended?

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews (Data Collection Approach #1)

Individual interviews of the participants occurred after the completion of the survey (Appendix E). The interviews were conducted via the Zoom meeting platform, so the participants could be in the environment where they felt the most comfortable. The scheduled interviews were face-to-face conversations (via Zoom) that explored the topic of this study in detail (Pope & Mays, 1995). As Larkin et al. (2019) suggested, I conducted semi-structured interviews guided by prepared questions that allowed for a natural conversation. I was a first-time researcher, so semi-structured interviews assisted with keeping the interview on track (Larkin et al., 2019). The individual interviews were recorded through the Zoom platform, and all footage is secured on a digital storage system to which only I have access.

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself. CRQ (Central Research Question)
2. Please share the year you graduated from high school. CRQ
3. With as much detail as possible, describe your definition of college readiness. SQ1 (Sub-Question 1)
4. With as much detail as possible, describe your definition of career readiness. SQ2 (Sub-Question 2)
5. What were your positive experiences with your high school's college and career readiness curriculum? SQ1
6. What were your negative experiences with your high school's college and career readiness curriculum? SQ1
7. Describe your high school teachers' instructional styles. SQ1
8. Tell me how your high school teachers' instructional styles affected your interest in/readiness for college settings? SQ1
9. Tell me how your high school teachers' instructional styles affected your interest in/readiness for workforce settings? SQ2
10. What are the characteristics of an effective high school teacher at a Title I school? CRQ
11. What do you think ARS should be taught about college and career readiness? CRQ
12. Explain whether or not you feel your SES affected your ability to be successful in a postsecondary institution (college, trade school, certificate program)? SQ1
13. Explain whether or not you feel your SES affected your readiness to enter the workforce? SQ2

14. With as much detail as possible, describe the postsecondary plans you created during your senior year of high school. SQ1
15. What information from the college and career readiness curriculum helped you attain your postsecondary goals? SQ1
16. What recommendations do you have for college and career readiness curriculum writers? CRQ
17. Is there any other information you would want to share with me about your experience with the college and career readiness curriculum at your school or its effect on your postsecondary outcomes? CRQ
18. How involved were your parents/guardians in your college or career readiness plans? CRQ
19. How do you feel about your parents/guardians' role in your high school education? CRQ

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #1)

The data collected focused on what each participant experienced and was used to theme codes that accurately described experiences that impacted their lives immediately after the phenomenon occurred. The data sought to uncover shared meanings and themes between the participants' experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As the participants recalled their memories and feelings about the phenomenon, I developed a system of themed codes that pinpointed how the Title I CCR curriculum affected the postsecondary outcomes of this particular demographic of the ARS (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study followed Moustakas's (1994) seven steps to analyze the collected data. The seven steps of this analytical tool were:

- reviewing each statement for accuracy in describing the experience,
- recording all significant statements,

- removing repetitive statements,
- organizing the themes of constant meaning units,
- combining themes into the explanations of the various textures of the participants' experience,
- using educated intuition and multiple perspectives to find the meanings in the content,
- and creating descriptions of what the experience was and how the participants' perceived the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The data analysis used the transcendental phenomenological approach through epoché, reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing (Moustakas, 1994). Systematic coding, triangulation, and description were also employed (Moustakas, 1994).

Focus Groups (Data Collection Approach #2)

Krueger and Casey (2009) defined focus groups as carefully planned discussions, which seek to collect the perceptions of a particular topic in a comfortable, nonthreatening environment. Participants chosen for the focus group discussion were based on the participants' willingness. There were two focus groups, each held via password-protected Zoom platform meeting so the data collected could be transcribed and reviewed and to protect the confidentiality of the participants' identities. Each group was asked the same questions (Appendix F). The first focus group had seven participants, selected randomly from the 10 participants in the study. The second focus group had some of the participants from the first group and participants who were not in the first group. A third focus group was not conducted because saturation was met through the first two focus groups. The participants in each group were encouraged to build on each other's thoughts in addition to providing their own perspectives. The goal of the focus group discussions was to engage in cooperative conversation that jogged their memories in different ways than individual interviewing (Krueger & Casey, 2009). I facilitated the conversation, as

suggested by Creswell (2013), so all participants contributed, and I monitored for any one individual that dominated the conversation.

Focus Group Questions

1. Please describe the most memorable experiences with college and career readiness at your high school. CRQ
2. Tell me about the low points with college and career readiness at your high school. CRQ
3. What was your perception of your high school's college and career readiness curriculum? CRQ
4. Describe the connections between your experience with the high school CCR curriculum and your postsecondary experiences. CRQ
5. Tell me about your level of comfort in college/trade school environments? SQ1
6. Tell me about your level of comfort in workforce environments? SQ1
7. What challenges have you experienced in postsecondary life? CRQ
8. What is your opinion of the college and career readiness culture of your high school while you were enrolled? CRQ
9. What suggestions do you have for future CCR curriculum developers? CRQ

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #2)

Data was coded and themed based on Creswell's (2013) description of how to analyze focus group data. The research used responses from the focus group participants to precisely describe what they experienced and how it was experienced in terms of the focal phenomenon of this study. Coding of the data followed Creswell's (2013) suggested coding process of identifying common themes to convey the essence of the experience with the phenomenon.

Writing Prompts (Data Collection Approach #3)

The participants responded to four writing prompts so I could secure the most profound thoughts and explanations of the data received during the interviews and focus groups (Appendix E). I collected various expressions of the shared experience and gained a more detailed description of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The writing prompts were open-ended questions designed to gather self-reported data in a private, informal setting without being distracted by the interviewer or other participants (Creswell, 2013; Vagle, 2018). The boundaries of this study required each participant to respond with three to four sentences for each prompt (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Writing Prompt Items

1. Describe any challenges you encountered with your postsecondary education. SQ1
2. Describe your opinions and thoughts of the college environment in comparison to your high school environment. SQ1
3. Describe any challenges you encountered in finding (or trying to find) employment. SQ2
4. Describe your opinions and thoughts of a professional environment in comparison to your high school environment. CRQ

For this qualitative study, the four questions allowed the participants to reflect on the prompts and clarify their responses in an open-ended response format. These questions were inquiries of thought, asking the participants to describe their beliefs about the phenomenon (Patton, 2002), providing an opportunity for me to garner richer descriptions of the phenomenon.

Writing Prompts Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #3)

For this qualitative study, four prompts allowed the participants to reflect on and clarify their responses in an open-ended response format. For a phenomenological study, data collection involves a variety of sources of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the writing prompts satisfied

this necessity. These questions were inquiries of thought and asked participants to describe their beliefs about the phenomenon (Patton, 2002), which provided an opportunity for me to garner richer descriptions of the phenomenon.

Data Synthesis

As described by Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology is the examination of reality through the individual's shared experience, and my role as the researcher was to find the essence of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis of this study identified themes about the shared experiences that emerged from the interviews, focus groups, and writing prompts. Triangulation of all collected data ensured validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method and the modified Van Kaam method are both described by Moustakas (1994), for analyzing data for phenomenological research of this nature because my profile fits that of the participant sample criteria and the issue that was investigated is my professional passion. The modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994) was used because it has more popularity among researchers in the field of education (Creswell, 1993). The description of the steps may constitute its popularity and may contribute to the transferability of the study.

The process of the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994) employs phenomenological reduction, including bracketing, horizontalizing, and then organizing invariant qualities and themes to construct textural description (Moustakas, 1994). Data analysis commenced as soon as the first set of data was available. Horizontalization assisted me in assigning equal value to each statement that represented a segment of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Then, the segments were clustered into different themes. A description of the texture (the *what*) was revealed once the segments and themes were synthesized. Through imaginative variation, the examination of the textural description occurred from different perspectives and

eventually revealed a description of the structure (the *how*). The meaning and essence of the experience was represented by the textural-structural description that emerged (Creswell, 1993 Moustakas, 1994). The textural-structural description was generated for each participant by repeating the above steps until saturation was achieved. Then descriptions were integrated into a universal description of group experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, validity is the justification of the accuracy and credibility of the study (Gay et al., 2006). The focus of a transcendental phenomenological study is the description of the essence of the experience; therefore, I ensured trustworthiness by utilizing the means appropriate to the study design (Moustakas, 1994). My findings included accurate descriptions of the participants' experiences, and ensured the authenticity of the study (Patton, 2002). A validation process for accuracy was the best, with triangulation practiced (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1990) defined credibility as the accuracy of the findings in a study, and it was the level at which I interpreted the phenomenon accurately. Credibility for this qualitative study was achieved through triangulation, member checking, and thick descriptions. Member checking required that the data, their analyses, interpretations, and their conclusions were sent to the participants so they could review the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2013). This strategy allowed the participants to check my interpretations for accuracy, and they helped validate the study's credibility (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). As Creswell (2013) described, thick description is when the researcher provides details while describing a case or writing about a common theme of the participants' experience. The transcripts of all interviews and the focus group meeting were sent to the participants so they could check for accuracy. The participants

were encouraged to adjust or make addendums to the descriptions as necessary. I used rich, descriptive detail and direct quotes to achieve thick descriptions within the transcripts.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that credibility elevates when contributors work as a collaborative team. To establish credibility in this study, I used triangulation, case evaluation, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). This investigative research embedded four types of triangulation to enable a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and ensure that the comprehensive data were rich (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 2018; Patton, 1999). Triangulating the data corroborated the results through multiple forms of data collection in order to test for authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). I cross validated and collaborated with the participants in describing the phenomenon.

Transferability

I collected and developed descriptive data in the framework of transcendental qualitative research so the phenomenon of focus was transferable through contextual patterns (Guba, 1981). For qualitative research to be transferable, the data must be context bound. The aim was to show the findings' applicability to other contexts, populations, or settings (Lincoln &Guba, 1990). This study utilized a thick description to account for a valid phenomenon in abundant, descriptive details (Guba, 1981). This way aided the process of transferability by putting forth all of the conditions to optimize transferability although it could not be completely assured. The information collected can be transferable to other communities of low SES with settings similar to that of this study.

Dependability

In order to strengthen the research, I gathered information in various ways to obtain a complete depiction of the phenomenon (Guba, 1981). After I cataloged responses from the surveys, interviews, focus groups, and writing prompts, I cross verified the information as a form

of evaluation and found the patterns and categories. I acted as a human instrument in the study, as an unbiased filter through which the data were collected and coded according to the varying perspectives of the phenomenon (Mills, 2007). I kept a reflective journal to chronicle all field notes and identified points of theoretical and practical importance, in addition to including significant perceptions and insights. The study employed an external audit to examine the fidelity of the process using multiple data compilations to establish the external review path (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). Using multiple data collection forms and cross validating the data strengthened the study's dependability (Guba, 1981).

Confirmability

Confirmability was established through the use of audits, audit trails, triangulation, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). All interviews were be recorded and transcribed to ensure conformability of the audit and the proper audit trails. A third-party company completed the transcriptions of the interviews and pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). The participants were asked to read through the transcripts of their interview to ensure accuracy and to complete any missing information (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). This process ensured that the findings of this study were shaped by the participants' experiences and not my bias, motivations, or interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). I maintained a reflective journal and field notes to reflect on and recognize my preconceptions, beliefs, values, assumptions, and opinions (Lincoln & Guba, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

The first ethical considerations of this study were obtaining IRB approval and getting the participants' informed consent through a consent form (Appendix A and Appendix B). The informed consent was a written description of this study's purpose, an explanation of the voluntary nature of this study, the commitment of time that was involved, my intentions for the

use of the results, each participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time, and my guarantee of confidential in the handling of all data collected through appropriate data collection methods (Creswell, 2013). Protecting the participants' privacy was of the utmost importance, and I felt obligated to handle all information in a sensitive nature. The data are kept confidential through a secure computer, locked inside a desk at my home, to which only I have access. The data will be destroyed three years after the publication of this dissertation. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure consideration for ethics and the preservation of the participants' anonymity.

Summary

ARS of low SES in Title I high schools need appropriate instruction and support from their CCR instruction because knowledge of concepts taught within the CCR curriculum can be a deciding factor in these individuals' ability to complete postsecondary degree programs or attain gainful employment after graduating from high school (Henry & Stahl, 2017; Poshka, 2019; Schmidt, 2018). The transcendental phenomenological research design provided insight into how the CCR program made participants feel about their transition from high school to postsecondary settings, their postsecondary options, and the rate at which they felt the CCR course prepared them for the academic and behavioral expectations of college and workforce settings. The design choice allowed for an in-depth description of the phenomenon, and the data collection and analysis strategies allowed for a rich retelling of the participants' experiences with the state-approved, standards-based, Title I high school CCR curriculum, and the effect of the content and delivery of that curriculum on these graduates' postsecondary outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the standards-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. Understanding the experiences of these graduates through interviews, focus groups, and written responses can assist in determining the effectiveness of the CCR curriculum that is currently in place in those schools. Additionally, understanding the factors of the CCR curriculum that Title I high school graduates perceived to affect their postsecondary experiences can result in the improvement of CCR curriculum content and delivery, which is designed for students who are at risk due to factors associated with their low SES. A transcendental phenomenological qualitative research approach was utilized because of the importance of identifying structured themes and meanings to describe the shared phenomenon. The central research question was, "What are the shared, postsecondary experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum?" The first sub-question was "What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in postsecondary institutions?" The second sub-question was, "What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in workforce settings?" Chapter Four includes data from the individual interviews, focus group interviews, and written responses, and it concludes with a summary of the study's findings.

Participants

There were 10 participants in this study. They were all ARS of low SES who completed a CCR curriculum at Title I high schools in northwest Georgia. They were between the ages of 20 and 30. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. All participants

agreed to video and audio recording for the data collection, they were all provided with and signed the informed consent, and all affirmed to the research procedures prior to data collection. Table 1 displays the participants' demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	High School Year Graduated	Attended College Courses	Graduated College or Trade School	Current Profession
Angel	2014	Yes	Yes	Teacher
Ashley	2012	Yes	Yes	Property Manager
Cameron	2016	Yes	Yes	Staff Sergeant
Donna	2013	Yes	Yes	Teacher
John	2016	Yes	Yes	Teacher
Jordan	2011	Yes	Yes	Coding Analyst
Mary	2017	Yes	Yes	Bank Teller
Olivia	2018	Yes	No	Corrections Officer
Tasha	2019	Yes	No	Fitness Instructor
William	2017	Yes	Yes	Soldier

Angel

Angel graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2014, and she graduated from an undergraduate degree program in 2019. She was raised by her mother in a single-parent home and was the first in her family to graduate from both high school and college. Angel shared that her mother was not very active in her high school or college education. She felt that her high school teachers' lessons were more focused on her ability to pass course-specific state tests than about preparing her for college-level work. At the time of her interview, she was gainfully employed as a teacher.

Ashley

Ashley graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2012, and she went to college immediately after high school. She was raised in a two-parent household; neither of her parents graduated from high school. Both of her parents were very much involved in her high school and college education. She left college after her second semester and attributed her need to drop out of college to the fact that she was not academically ready for the rigor of college-level work. She returned after a 1-year hiatus and earned her undergraduate degree. At the time of her interview she worked as a property manager.

Cameron

Cameron graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2016. Her father raised her in a single-parent home, neither of her parents completed high school. Cameron enlisted in the U.S. Army and earned her bachelor's degree while enlisted. She said her instructors of her Junior Reserve Officer Training Courses (JROTC) were the driving force behind her preparedness for college and her career in the military and that throughout her life, her parents were not very involved in her education. At the time of her interview, she was employed as a staff sergeant in the U.S. Army.

Donna

Donna graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2013. Her mother raised her in a single-parent home. She said her mother was very involved in her education until her sophomore year of high school. She went to college directly after high school, completed an undergraduate degree, and at the time of her interview, was employed as a teacher. Donna shared that the academic work of her high school courses was more difficult than the work she experienced in college especially because the instructional style of her high school teachers was different from her college professors.

John

John graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2016. He went to college immediately after graduating from high school. His grandmother raised him in a single-parent home. His grandmother graduated from high school, but his parents did not. He said his basketball coach was very involved in his preparedness for college and career settings, but his teachers were not. He attributes his postsecondary success to his grandmother and basketball coach being very involved in his high school education. Upon completing his bachelor's degree, he became a physical education teacher and was employed in that position at the time of his interview.

Jordan

Jordan graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2011. His mother raised him in a single-parent home. His father graduated from high school, but his mother did not. After graduating from high school, Jordan attended college for two years and then left college to join the military. He stayed on active duty for 5 years and returned to college once he was discharged. He earned his undergraduate degree within 3 years of returning to school and, at the time of his interview, employed as a coding analyst. He recalled having many discussions about his academic and professional future with his parents but did not recall this being a topic of discussion in any of his high school classes.

Mary

Mary graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2017. Her grandmother raised her in a single-parent home. Neither of her parents went to high school. She graduated from college with a major in accounting. At the time of her interview, was employed as a bank teller. She shared that her high school teachers and substitute teachers exposed her to

the course content, but they did not deliver the content in a way that prepared her for college-level work.

Olivia

Olivia graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2018. Her mother raised her in a single-parent home and was minimally involved in her high school education. She was the first person in her family to graduate from high school. Upon graduation from high school, she got a job as a corrections officer and intended to work in this field until she retires. At the time of her interview, she was taking college courses. Olivia stated that nothing about her high school experience prepared her for postsecondary settings because her teacher's instructional styles did not match her college professors' instructional style or the expectations of the supervisors at her job.

Tasha

Tasha graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2019. Her grandmother raised her in a single-parent home and was very involved in her high school education. She felt that both the course work and the classroom atmosphere at her high school underprepared her for college because it seemed like the teachers were "just trying to get through the day." After failing one of the two college courses she took, she did not return to school. Soon after, she became a fitness instructor. She felt that the high school coursework and environment did not prepare her for professional settings and it was her work experience that gave her the skills she needed to get a full-time job.

William

William graduated from a Title I high school in the state of Georgia in 2018. His mother raised him in a single-parent home and was minimally involved in his high school education. Shortly after high school graduation, William enlisted in the U.S. Army, and at the time of his

interview he was on active duty. He planned to remain on active duty until he retires from the Army. He shared that his experience at his high school discouraged him from going to college or pursuing a postsecondary degree because his high school education did not prepare him for college-level academic work. He also shared that his readiness for the workforce was the result of experience in the military—not his high school education.

Results

This study focused on a central research question and two sub-questions that sought to describe the postsecondary experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed a standards-based CCR curriculum. The participants were individually interviewed, engaged in a focus group interview, and completed written prompt responses, which provided the data for the research process. The themes were established from raw data with in vivo participant quotes and were organized into three themes and eight subthemes. The themes, subthemes, and associated research questions are described in Table 2.

Table 2

Theme Organization

Theme	Subtheme	Research Question
Preparedness for College	Remedial Courses in College	SQ1
	College Course Rigor	SQ1
	Instructional Style	SQ1
Preparedness for the Workforce	Behavioral Expectations	SQ2
	Underdeveloped Financial Literacy	SQ2
High School Environment	High Staff Turnover	CRQ
	Unsafe School Conditions	CRQ
	Minimal Parental Involvement	CRQ

Note. SQ1 = Sub-Question 1; SQ2 = Sub-Question 2; CRQ = Central Research Question.

Preparedness for College

A salient theme found within the analysis of the data was the level at which the participants were prepared for college upon graduation from high school. All of the participants mentioned their difficulty with the transition from their Title I high schools to their college settings. This theme highlights the participants' ecological transition, or movement within their microsystem, that alters the makeup of the microsystem and is a key factor in the description of how the transition from the ecological setting of their high school impacted their outcomes in educational settings of postsecondary institutions. Bronfenbrenner (1992) postulated that setting transitions, particularly in the microsystem, impact individuals' cognitive and social developmental throughout their lifespan. The impact of the transition from their high school setting to their college setting was prominent in the participants' perception of the effectiveness of their high schools' CCR curriculum on their preparedness for transitioning to and succeeding in college spaces.

Within the context of this study, preparedness for college was defined as a high school graduate being ready to enroll and succeed in college without remediation in a variety of postsecondary institutions Olivia mentioned, "I was nowhere near ready for college, but I did not know that until my freshman year in college. I did well on high school exams and in my classes, but the work in college was so much harder." The participants mentioned their difficulty transitioning from their high school setting to their college setting and specifically discussed the differences in academic expectations. Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory describes how the environment in which one is educated has a significant impact on the individual's ability to develop cognitively (Crawford et al., 2020; Merçon, 2020), and the participants of this study shared that their lack of cognitive preparedness for their college settings. They felt that their lack of preparedness for college was the result of the incongruence

between the academic environment of their Title I high schools and that of the colleges they attended.

Remedial Courses in College

The need for remedial courses in college was a prominent subtheme within the participants' discussion of their preparedness for college. Within the context of this study, a remedial class was defined as a course that is designed specifically for students who have basic deficiencies in the skills necessary to do beginning postsecondary work as defined by the institution (Kremer, 2022). One of the most common attributes of the experiences among the participants was their need for remedial classes in their first year of attending college. The participants' microsystem during their time in high school outlined the processes that influenced their academic and social development, which impacted their ability to handle the changes in their microsystem as they transitioned to college settings. When compared to students of high SES, it has been found that a majority of students of low SES need to take remedial courses in their first year of college, which can be attributed to the quality of education found in high schools with high concentrations of this population (Ghazzawi, 2019; Kremer, 2022; Melguizo & Ngo, 2020). This speaks to the substantial impact of the high school setting within the microsystem on an individual's educational attainment. The data of this study reinforce Bronfenbrenner's (1992) postulation on how economic status can be a determinant of the quality of education available to the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Crawford et al., 2020).

Within this study, seven of the 10 participants shared they needed to take remedial courses in their first year of college. These participants included Ashley, Cameron, Donna, John, Jordan, Mary, and Olivia. Ashley shared, "The work I got in my high school English classes did not even prepare me for what I had to know for the remedial classes. I had to learn how to write essays all over again." Donna, John, Jordan, and Mary recalled "feeling confused" about why

they needed remedial courses when they scored high grades in English and math during their junior and senior years of high school. Donna shared, “I didn’t understand how I could need remedial courses when I did well in high school English and math. I was on the honor roll!” In his writing prompt response, John mentioned, “I always got 90s on my report card. I was like-what were my teachers teaching me? Whatever it was, apparently it wasn’t enough.” Ashley, Cameron, and Olivia had similar sentiments about having “high grades on high school report cards in English and math,” but having to take remedial courses after low performance on entrance exams for their colleges. Cameron shared,

> Nothing on that entrance exam was covered in my math class in high school. I knew some formulas and stuff, but my math teachers in high school definitely did not cover a lot of the topics on that college entry test.

Similar to Cameron, Mary shared,

> I thought I was good in English until I got the scores from the college entry exam. My teachers in high school said I was a good writer, so I didn’t understand how I could score so low on my essay on the entry exam for college.

A common characteristic of each of the participants, Ashley, Cameron, Donna, John, Jordan, Mary, and Olivia, was that they all scored high grades on their high school report cards for the subjects of English and math, but they still needed to take remedial courses for at least one of those subjects. Based on the comparison between the participants’ report card grades and their outcomes in their freshman year in college, the participants’ chronosystems, or milestone moments in their cognitive development, were not effectively measured within the scope of preparedness for college settings. The accurate measurement of these milestone moments in education was the responsibility their school, and the incongruent curriculum could have resulted in missed milestones in their chronosystem during their time in high school. Each of the

participants expressed feeling frustrated about having to take remedial courses in college after receiving high marks on assignments in these subjects when they were in high school. The seven participants thought they were fully prepared for college-level content but found there was an incongruence between what they learned in high school English and math classes and what they needed to know to succeed in those subjects at the college level.

College Course Rigor

In addition to frustration about having to take remedial courses, all 10 participants discussed the difference in course rigor between their high school courses and their college courses. They expressed that the difficulty of the work was compounded by the "amount of work" and the "short timeframes given to complete the work." In the context of this study, course rigor was defined as the level of difficulty of assignments as well the number of assignments given and the period of time in which those assignments are to be completed (Castro, 2021).

All 10 of the participants commented on how the amount of work in their college courses was much higher than that of their high school classes, which made it much more difficult to abide by the deadlines listed on the syllabi. The development of these academic skills primarily should have taken place in the educational setting of their microsystem while they were in high school. Without appropriate development in these skills sets during their time in high school, the chronosystem of their collegial experience was disrupted. Angel shared:

> One thing I noticed when I got to college was the amount of work I had to do. I took four courses my first semester and it seemed like the amount of work I did in those four courses was more than all my classes in an entire year of high school. I felt so overwhelmed, and it was frustrating because I felt like I never had enough time or energy to study for one of my college classes, let alone four.

In a focus group discussion, Cameron, Donna, John, and Olivia also shared similar feelings about the "amount of work" they had to complete in their college courses. The participants shared that the education received in their microsystem during their time in high school compromised their ability to thrive in the microsystem of their college setting, which resulted in their difficulty in meeting the milestones of their freshman year of undergraduate studies. Cameron, John, and Olivia mentioned that they were expected to read "two to three chapters a day" when their high school teachers would give them weeks to complete a similar amount of reading. Olivia said,

> It was like my professors didn't consider the fact that I had to work while I was in school. I didn't have enough time to go to work, sleep, and have the mental energy I needed to read the chapters they assigned.

In their written prompts, Cameron and John shared they had part-time jobs while enrolled in college. John shared, "I felt the amount of work my professors assigned showed they were used to teaching rich kids that had all the time in the world that they needed to read and study." This experience echoes Bronfenbrenner's (1992) discussion on educational systems within the microsystem of grade school students and the impact of school integration being moderated by social class.

A reoccurring issue for all participants was "not having enough time to finish work" in their college courses, compared to the amount of time they had to finish assignments in their high school courses. This speaks to the underdevelopment of time management skills they received in their microsystem while in high school, specifically within their high school courses. Cameron, Jordan, Mary, and Tasha all commented on how their high school teachers gave them less work to do with longer periods of time to complete the work. Cameron shared:

> I wasn't used to having to write five- and 10-page papers in such a short period of time. My high school teachers were always extending deadlines so there was never as much pressure. In college, my professors would assign a 10-page paper and expect it done in a week. In high school, a five-paragraph essay was enough, and we had a whole month to do it.

Angel, Ashley, Donna, John, Mary, and William had similar experiences with their high school teachers in the area of the "extension of due dates for assignments" and mentioned that their college professors "were not as forgiving or understanding" when they needed more time to finish work. Mary said, "I failed one of my classes in my second year of college because the professor played no games about assignment due dates. If there was a due date on the syllabus, he was sticking it no matter what." Ashley, John, and William all mentioned having arguments with their professors about not having enough time to complete their work. In response to his grievance about needing an extension for assignments, John remembers his professor saying, "I really don't care. The deadlines are on the syllabus, so work it out."

The discussion about the subtheme of rigor of college courses also included the degree to which the participants possessed the technological training their college professors expected them to have. With the exception of Angel, the participants said that technological skills were not taught in their high school courses and were rarely used to complete assignments. The underdevelopment of this skill set in the school environment of their microsystem during their time in high school had a serious impact on their success in college settings. Nine of the 10 participants mentioned that their lack of knowledge about computer software programs like Microsoft Office Word, PowerPoint, and Adobe was a serious barrier to their ability to keep up with peers who went to high schools that had a strong technological presence within their classrooms and school libraries. Mary shared,

> All of my college courses required me to create a PowerPoint presentation, but I had never used PowerPoint in high school, so it took me a while to learn the program properly. My [high school] teachers used it a lot in their lessons, but never made us use it for assignments.

Ashley had a similar experience and said,

> Some of my teachers made it optional, but we were never required to use it, so I never really had to learn the program. A few of classmates used it, but I did all my assignments on paper. Even for my presentations, I just used poster board.

Ashley, Mary, Donna, Olivia, and Tasha all mentioned that their lack of practice with academic software in high school hindered their academic success in college because their professors expected them to be comfortable with programs like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. They mentioned "watching YouTube videos to learn the software" because they never had to use those programs in high school. With the exception of Angel, each participant shared that was rarely used to submit assignments or take exams in their high school courses. These experiences highlighted how disparities in the educational setting of their microsystems during their high school years created issues that carried into their postsecondary lives. The influence of the instructional environments' exclusion of technological skill development resulted in a stunted ability to perform successfully in college settings, compounding their difficulty in the ecological transition from to college settings (Gonzales et al., 2020).

All 10 participants mentioned that technological knowledge was necessary in their college courses to submit assignments. Additionally, all 10 participants shared that their college professors expected them to have full knowledge of web-based learning environments, like Blackboard Learn, where they were expected to submit assignments and participate in asynchronous discussions with the professor and the other students in the class. Eight of the 10

participants, Ashley, Cameron, Donna, John, Mary, Olivia, Tasha, and William, mentioned that their classrooms had desktop computers, but that they were "always broken." Mary shared,

> My school had one laptop cart for each floor that the teachers had to share and half the time the laptops were never charged so we never really used them in class. If we did, it was pretty much for playing games or listening to music.

Tasha also recalled having a class set of laptops in her social studies class and said, "We had laptops, but that class was at the end of the day, so they were always dead. Most of them were broken anyway; missing keys on the keyboard or broken touch screens that didn't work." Angel and Jordan felt that they were well versed in technology and shared that this knowledge was the result of the technology being available in their homes and school libraries. Similar to the other participants, use of computer software programs was not a requirement for submitting assignments in their high school classes.

Instructional Style

Within the conversation of course rigor, another salient subtheme was the incongruence between the instructional style of the high school teachers and that of their college professors. Individuals' microsystems include their teachers, and teachers' instructional style has a significant impact on the cognitive development and success in future settings throughout individuals' lifespan (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Seven of the 10 participants mentioned the incongruence between the instructional styles of their high school teachers and that of their college professors and how those differences affected their ability to keep up with the assigned work in their college settings. Social influences within the microsystem govern individuals' social development and how they interact with others throughout their lifespan (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Angel, Donna, John, Jordan, Mary, Olivia, and William specifically discussed the "leniency" and "easy going nature" of their high school teachers in contrast to the "strict" and

"impersonal" style of their college professors. The difference in the instructional styles between the two levels of academia had a profound effect on their feelings of preparedness for college courses. In the context of this study, instructional style is defined as the way course content is delivered and how that delivery is influenced by the personality of the individual who is teaching (Castro, 2021).

In their written responses, Angel, John, Mary, and William described the instructional style of their high school teachers as "friendly," "hands-on," and "understanding." These four participants mentioned that many of their high school teachers were close in age to their students, so they had "more of a friendship than a professional relationship." William shared:

> A lot of my teachers in high school were in their early or mid-20s and acted like they were friends or family, while my college professors where much older, mostly 40s, 50s, and probably 60s and were a lot less personable. My professors never asked me about how my day was going, how I felt about the work, but my teachers in high school actually cared a lot about me on a personal level. As a matter of fact, most of my high school teachers started their lessons with questions about how I was feeling emotionally. My professors never ever did. In college, you do the work and leave—no emotions, no feelings.

Given that influences from the entities within one's microsystem have the most significant impact on social development, the participants' experiences with their high school teachers had a significant impact regarding their expectations for social interaction with their college professors (Smith & Shouppe, 2018). The vast differences in social behaviors between their high school teachers and college professors contributed to their difficulty in the ecological transition between the two levels of academia (Castro, 2021). Angel, Donna, and Olivia referred to their high school teachers as "adopted moms" who were very involved and invested in their

individual growth and their personal lives, while their professors "could care less" about any aspect of their personal lives. Angel, Mary, and Olivia shared that many of their high school teachers referred to them as their "daughter" and would often treat them like they were members of their own families. Donna, Mary, Jordan, and John all described their college professors' instructional styles as far less personable and very "distant and cold."

Preparedness for the Workforce

All 10 participants, at the time of their interview, were employed, and they all discussed how they were lacking in certain skills they needed to be prepared to enter the workforce. In the context of this study, readiness for workforce settings is defined as the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to meet employers' needs and expectations (Wilcox et al., 2018). As far as the skills the participants needed to enter the workforce, like the necessary knowledge to complete a job application, resume, cover letter writing, all 10 of the participants noted the difficulty they experienced in this type of preparedness for workforce settings upon graduating from high school. Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecology systems theory proposes that the life outcomes of an individual are most significantly impacted by the development they received in their microsystem, especially in their school settings; therefore, one's transition into the workforce is a direct result of the influence of one's microsystem, particularly the grade school environment.

Five participants, Angel, Ashley, Jordan, Olivia, and Tasha, mentioned their lack of knowledge in "how to fill out a job application, or where to find a job application on a company website." Ashley shared that "I remember asking one of the cashiers at a Kroger for a job application, and she looked at me like I was stupid. She laughed and said, 'all the applications are on the computer now.'" In his written response, Jordan shared a similar experience. He did not know job applications were computer-based until he went into a fast-food restaurant and asked for a paper application. In a focus group, he commented, "What CCR did I have if I didn't

even know job applications were all online?" Olivia and Tasha mentioned that when they went online to a company website, they "didn't know where to look to find the application." Angel had a similar sentiment and shared, "None of my high school teachers showed me how to fill out an application; I had to figure that out on my own."

For many careers, resumes are a necessary component of the job application process, and this skill is often lacking in students of low SES (Castro, 2021). Four of the 10 participants, Donna, John, Mary, and William recalled asking their high school teachers for assistance with writing a resume, but they were directed to use templates found on Microsoft Word. John shared "I don't even think my teacher knew how to write a resume because every time I asked her for help, she would just open her computer and show me the templates." Mary said,

> I remember a couple of my English teachers saying how important it was to write a resume, but they never taught me how to do it. I just went on the computer and did the best I could. I wish I had had a lesson on it because I remember my first resume was terrible.

Here, the influence of the microsystem on the transition to workforce settings is evident because the underdevelopment of transitional skills led to unpreparedness for workforce settings. Angel, Cameron, and Donna shared that they did not know they needed a list of references to be able to get a job, and just like not knowing how to create a resume, they did not know how to compile a list of references. Angel said,

> I ended up using my friends as references because I was never told what a job reference was or how to get one until I was in college. My English tutor in college is the one who showed me how to do it and who I was supposed to ask.

Behavioral Expectations

The subtheme of behavioral expectations was recurring as the participants discussed their readiness for workforce settings in relation to their high school setting. In the context of this study, behavioral expectations on the job are a part of the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, which are nontechnical competencies associated with an employee's personality and attitude and that are appropriate for professional settings (Bolli & Renold, 2017; Martin, 2019). These behaviors are developed by an individual's microsystem from the time of childhood, and they carry well into their adult lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). In different ways, all of the participants highlighted the incongruence between the behavioral expectations of their high school teachers and that of their employers. Donna, John, and William mentioned the behaviors they displayed in their high school classes that were "completely unacceptable in job settings," pointing out how their "lateness to class, use of inappropriate language, and talking on cellphones" was a daily occurrence in their high school courses but were never acceptable at their places of employment. Ashley, Cameron, John, and Olivia shared that they had part-time jobs while they were in high school, and they learned job-appropriate behavior when they "got an actual job." Angel and Cameron both felt that their high school experience "did nothing to prepare them to get a job." Angel shared:

> In high school, as long as I handed in the work, I could do what I wanted, walk into class when I wanted, even laugh and talk with my friends during class time. I acted the fool in class and my teachers let me; but when I got a job, I had to calm down and act professional. I didn't really know what that meant until I started at my job.

Ashley recalled, "There was no way my supervisor would let me walk in and out of work when I wanted. If I didn't show up to work, I wouldn't get paid, but I cut class all the time and still passed all my classes." John said:

> As long as my work was done, my teachers let me slide on things like wearing headphones in class, playing games on my phone, and stuff like that. When I got my first job, I acted the same way and almost got fired so, no, I don't think my high school experience prepared me for career settings. Just because you do your work at your job doesn't mean you get to act unprofessionally.

The participants' shared that the experience of being underprepared for the workforce was another indication of the underdevelopment that occurred in the high school setting of their microsystem as far as socialization for postsecondary settings. According to Bronfenbrenner (1992), social behaviors developed in the microsystem during childhood impact an individual's behavioral habits well into adulthood and much of this social development occurs in the school setting. The participants' experiences mirror this theory because they carried many of the undesirable behaviors developed their high school years into the workforce during their adult years.

Underdeveloped Financial Literacy

In relation to workforce readiness, another salient subtheme of the participants' experience was their lack of financial literacy training and how this lack of knowledge had serious effects on their postsecondary experiences in college and in their personal lives. All 10 participants mentioned the omission of topics like credit score, personal financial accounting, and the negative impact of debt on their daily lives within their high school curriculums. The participants all mentioned how none of their courses in high school, not even their math courses, taught them the importance of financial planning and the fact that they learned these lessons long after they graduated from high school. These disparities within the education received in their microsystem during their time in high school created a lack of financial literacy that had a serious impact on their postsecondary life. The participants felt that if their high school

curriculum was truly designed for CCR, financial literacy was one of the subjects that should have been taught during their time in high school. All 10 participants expressed sentiments about the "major impact of financial illiteracy" and that was one of the most detrimental factors within their postsecondary life outcomes, which mirrored the findings of Berman et al. (2018) about the ecological environment of schools in communities of low SES and the economic outcomes of the student from those schools.

Within the conversation of financial literacy, personal finance and money management was a prevalent point in the second focus group's discussion. Angel, Ashley, Cameron, Jordan, and Mary shared how they inherited their parents' lack of knowledge about money management and the importance of saving money. Jordan and Mary's written responses revealed that their families did not have a tradition of gainful employment or economic stability, so they never learned how to properly invest the money they earned from their jobs. The participants discussed how the gaps in educational attainment and economic opportunity of their grandparents and parents led to their repeating the habits developed by their forbearers. This generational cycle of money mismanagement is a symptom of families of low SES, and the participants attributed this issue to the disadvantages found in their exosystem. Jordan shared:

> Anytime my grandmother would get money, it would be gone—like immediately. She had bad spending habits, and in high school and college I was doing the same thing. If I would've known how to invest in stuff like real estate or even how to save money properly back when I was in high school, I wouldn't have to work two jobs now. I make good money now, but if I had learned about money management back then, I wouldn't have to work at all. They should teach kids about credit scores and different types of savings accounts. Bad spending habits is what's keeping us all working-poor.

These sentiments mirror Bronfenbrenner's (1992) postulation that effective education in the microsystem can offset issues created by historical prejudices in law, housing, and economic attainment found within the exosystem of communities of low SES.

Ashley, Cameron, and William had similar feelings about the omission of personal finance courses in their high schools' curriculum. They expressed their frustration about the fact that their high school curriculum was supposed to prepare them for life in the workforce, but there was no education about how to manage the funds they earned when they joined the workforce. Cameron shared:

> I had a part-time job in high school, and I just spent my money on a whole bunch of stuff I didn't need. A lot of us did. I needed to learn about money management more then I needed to learn about anything else. I never used anything I learned in Earth Science, but classes on how to use credit and better spending habits could've actually changed my life for the better.

High School Environment

Negative school climate was a significant theme of discussion for seven of the 10 participants in this study. The experiences of these participants mirrored the findings of Smith and Shouppe (2018) who determined that schools with high concentrations of high-poverty students experience issues in student behavior and staffing that adversely affect educational attainment of the students at these schools. For Ashley, Cameron, Jordan, John, Mary, Olivia, and William, negative school climate was a salient theme of discussion in relation to CCR. All seven participants referred to the environment of their school as "depressing," and said the general atmosphere of the school "felt like a jail" and described the low quality of this area of their microsystem. Cameron and Mary both shared that they "hated going into the building" because "students were always fighting" and there was "always some adult yelling at kids in the

hallways." Each of these seven participants felt that their principals focused more on punitive measures when addressing behavior issues with students instead of restorative practices that corrected student behavior. Cameron, John, and Jordan discussed the constant "school lockdowns" and remembered multiple instances where they stayed in the same classroom for hours while school security broke up fights in the hallways or the administration searched for a student with a weapon. Mary shared "One time we stayed in the same classroom for half the day because someone's parent came up to the school with a gun looking for the group of girls that jumped her daughter."

High Staff Turnover

The seven participants who discussed their high schools' negative climate - Ashley, Cameron, Jordan, John, Mary, Olivia, and William- also shared their experience with high staff turnover and spoke of the constant changes in their schools' administration and teaching staff. This constant disruption of continuity in the school setting of their microsystem was a significant theme revealed in the analysis of the data. These participants mentioned that many of their teachers quit mid-year, which led to a high level of substitute teachers and little continuity of course curriculum. Ashley said "One year, my science teacher, English teacher, and my math teacher quit before Christmas and because the kids behaved so badly, the substitutes wouldn't stay either." Jordan, Olivia, and William had similar experiences and shared that they often had substitute teachers for "months at a time." In her written response, Olivia wrote "My school had three different principals in four years." She mentioned that these changes made the student's behaviors worse because the students felt that they were "running them out of the building." Jordan said, "One year, I had at least five different substitutes and none of them taught us anything. They just sat there on their phones and got paid." William had a similar experience in that many of his classes had several different substitutes that were all unfamiliar with the subject

matter of the classes. He said, “They just kept everybody quiet until the bell rang.” Smith and Shouppe’s (2018) study of the relationship between school climate in schools that serve high-needs populations found that the experiences of this study’s participants are regular occurrences in Title I schools. The research of Garcia and Weiss (2019) mirrored the experiences of the participants of this study, finding that the high staff turnover was a symptom of issues associated with the exosystem that creates the climate of high-poverty schools. Garcia and Weiss (2019) attributed the negative climate of these institutions to the hindrance of this study’s students’ educational outcomes in relation to college and workforce readiness, which illustrates how the climate of environments within students’ microsystem impact students’ educational attainment.

A result of constant staff turnover was the lack of classroom management. The participants shared how much of their negative classroom experiences were the result of inappropriate student behavior and their new teachers and substitute teachers’ inability to mitigate those behaviors, illustrating the impact of influences of students’ microsystem on their social development. John, Jordan, Mary, and William shared that they felt many of their teachers “either ignored bad behavior or pretended it wasn’t happening.” Olivia said she often felt that her teachers “allowed the same students to continue disrupting lessons on a daily basis, and just taught through the drama.” Six participants, Ashley, Cameron, John, Mary, Olivia, and William, shared that some teachers would “put the well-behaved students in a group and only work with them, ignoring the rest of the class.” In her written response, Mary shared:

> I had a few teachers that would curse and yell back at students who were cursing and yelling at them, which only made the situation worse. The students didn’t change, and they still didn’t get to teach, and this happened every day.”

John shared:

> A lot of my teachers acted like they were scared of the kids. One time, my classmate cursed out my English teacher and she ran out the room screaming and crying. Another time, a fight broke out in the classroom and the teacher didn't do anything but hide under her desk. From that day on, she didn't care what we did; she pretty much stopped teaching and let us do what we wanted in class.

Unsafe School Conditions

Another salient subtheme of negative school climate that the participants discussed was unsafe school conditions. In many Title I high schools, this issue is often a residual effect of teachers' inability to manage classrooms (Berman et al., 2018). One the focus group conversations led to a discussion about a constant police presence on their schools' campuses. Ashley, Cameron, John, and Mary mentioned that the hallways of their high schools were "constantly full of students who were kicked out of class or cutting class," which led to high levels of verbal and physical violence on school grounds. Olivia said, "I felt like the police were being called up to my school every day to help break up fights." William's experience was similar, and in his written response, he shared that there was always either a police officer or school safety officer on every floor of the high school he attended. The punitive measures used to govern the safety of this area of their microsystem could be attributed to a historically prejudicial justice system found within communities of low SES (Novak, 2019). The reliance on police forces to mitigate student behaviors is found throughout the microsystem of students of low SES and reflects the cultural and political ideologies within the exosystems and macrosystems of their communities. John shared "Things go so bad at my school, they brought in metal detectors because students were getting stabbed in the basement and in the bathrooms when adults weren't around. The basement always had some fight going on."

Minimal Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in their education was a prominent subtheme among eight of the 10 participants in this study. With the exception of Angel and John, the participants discussed their parents' limited involvement in their high school education, and they attributed this situation to their parents having two or three jobs. The participants' experiences with this area of their microsystem echoed the Wong et al. (2018) study findings in that parents of low SES have difficulty participating in their children's education because they have to work multiple jobs. Several participants mentioned the repercussions of having a single parent regarding their educational attainment in high school. Jordan shared, "My mom was never home because she was always working, and my dad was not in my life,, so neither of them were around to help me with school."

Donna, John, Mary, and Tasha specifically mentioned the disadvantages they experienced as the result of factors that created disadvantages common within the exosystem of communities of low SES. They discussed how the historical disadvantage of their neighborhoods caused the economic and social disparities of their communities, which created the conditions that led to their families' low SES and need for their parents and grandparents to work multiple jobs. Donna shared:

> My grandparents were living here long before the civil rights movement in the 1960s and they always told us stories about what areas our people were confined to. It's crazy how even though I'm free to live where I want to live in today's day and age, the fact that they couldn't get a house or job in a certain area stopped them from making higher salaries. They did the best they could with what they had, but they were still affected by racist laws, and so, of course, decades later, I'm affected by those racist laws because those laws stunted them and my parents, so, of course they stunt me too. It's not their fault they

> had to work all the time, they were put in that position. So them not being involved in my education wasn't because they didn't want to be, it's because they couldn't be. That's a systemic problem schools in our neighborhoods just don't address.

The participants commented on how their schools "should have done more parental outreach" about their education and "tried harder to involve parents" through programs that catered to their demographic. In this regard, the disconnected relationship between two significant areas of their microsystems created further disparities in the participants' educational attainment. Olivia shared:

> Schools in our neighborhoods know that most of the parents are either single parents or work more than one job, so they should have different ways for parents to do conferences, like on the weekends, or later in the evening.

Donna agreed with that sentiment and said, "My mother would have been way more involved if she actually knew what going on at the school. My school only called if I was absent or failed a class." These experiences highlight how the participants' mesosystems were deeply impacted by this issue. The linkage between the microsystems of their household and school environments was broken, resulting in limited interactions between the two environments, which adversely impacted their cognitive and social development, and, later, their postsecondary outcomes.

Research Question Responses

The study was guided by a central research question and two sub-questions. This section provides answers to the research questions using in vivo citations. The central research question was addressed first and focused on the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES who graduated from Title I high schools after completing a state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum. Next, the two sub-questions were addressed and discussed the specific effects of the

Title I high school CCR curriculum on the participants' experience in college settings and their experiences in workforce settings.

Central Research Question

What are the shared, postsecondary experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum? The participants' perspective was that their postsecondary experiences were negatively impacted by the lack of effective instruction about college and career preparation. In different ways, all 10 of the participants noted that the education provided at their Title I high schools did not educate them regarding how to navigate properly in postsecondary settings, because they were not taught how to effectively plan for success in the college and career settings of their postsecondary lives. Regarding their postsecondary outcomes, the overarching issue among all 10 participants was that they needed instruction on how to think about the kind of workforce industry that suited them best and the kind of school that was best for their individual professional interests. Donna shared:

> When I got out of high school, I felt lost. I went to college and got a job, but I didn't have the guidance I needed to choose a school or choose a job that was best for me. There should've been a class on that.

Cameron, John, and Olivia also shared thoughts about "feeling lost after high school graduation" and mentioned that they "didn't really feel ready for the real world." Olivia shared:

> I have a job that pays my bills, but I hate it. If I would've had a class on how to choose a career I like, instead of just being told to go to college and get a job, I would've made different life choices.

John said, "Everyone just said go to college, like going to college guaranteed a good life when it doesn't. You have to know why you are going to college for it to really matter."

Another overarching issue that the participants discussed in relation to their postsecondary outcomes was undeveloped financial literacy. The participants' perspective on their postsecondary outcomes regarding this topic was that financial literacy is one of the most important aspects of readiness for postsecondary life. All 10 participants spoke to how the ability to manage personal finances and the understanding of credit scores, debt, checking and savings accounts, and one's income-to-needs ratio had a serious impact on one's postsecondary outcomes; they did not receive instruction about these topics at their high schools. John shared "If you don't have a good credit score in this country, life is going to be real hard. Period. We should've started learning about financial management in the ninth grade, at least." Donna, Olivia, Tasha, and William mentioned how their families' lack of financial literacy affected their lack of knowledge on how to manage finances, which is an issue they felt should have been addressed at their high schools. William shared, "I think if I had money management instead of algebra, my life would've been way better after I graduated. I have never used anything from that algebra class, but I have to manage my money every day." Donna shared "A CCR curriculum won't change decades of problems that made our communities poor but learning about personal finances could."

Sub-Question One

What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in postsecondary institutions? In relation to the given CCR curriculum, the factors that influenced the participants' success in postsecondary institutions were the incongruence between the content and delivery of the courses in their high school and that of their courses in college. The need for remedial courses in college signaled the ineffectiveness of their high school curriculum in preparing them for college settings, specifically in the areas of course content, course rigor, and technological skills. Mary shared, "I did an extra year of work because I had to take remedial

courses. My entire freshman year was spent catching up on things I should've already learned in high school." Angel, Cameron, Donna, and Olivia also related their need for additional academic support during their first year of college, attributing this need to a subpar education received at the high school level. Cameron recalled,

> I thought I was ready for college until I failed that test and had to take remedial courses. I left high school feeling smart, but when I got to college, I kind of felt like my high school teachers had dumbed-down the work.

The participants also highlighted the incongruence between the content delivery and instructional style of their high school teachers and college professors as a factor that significantly impacted their readiness for college settings. Ashley said, "Teachers in high school took it way too easy on me. College professors are completely hands-off, and they always sent me to a tutor if I needed help." Jordan shared:

> There is no such thing as one-on-one instruction in college. In high school, my teachers would meet me after school or during lunch and work with me until I understood the assignment. In college, you either get it on your own or you fail.

Jordan and Mary spoke to their need for tutors and shared Ashley's feeling about not having the extra help they were used to receiving in high school.

Sub-Question Two

What influence did the given CCR curriculum have on these graduates' outcomes in workforce settings? In relation to the given CCR curriculum, the factors that influenced the participants' success in workforce settings was that the behavior they were allowed to display in their high school settings was not appropriate in their places of employment. The participants noted that their overall experiences with the classroom atmosphere and school culture were diametrically opposed to workforce settings. There were specific mentions of issues associated

with timeliness and work ethic, and how their high school teachers allowed them to "do what they wanted" as long as they completed their class assignments. Cameron shared:

> Acting professionally and respectfully was required at my job, not at school. If I cursed out a teacher, I could still go back to class the next day. There was no way I could to curse out a supervisor and keep my job.

The participants' experiences spoke to the findings of Yavuz et al. (2019), which attributed the lack of career readiness in students of high-poverty schools to the extreme differences between the atmospheres of those schools and that of professional settings. Angel and Ashley both shared how their teachers ignored behaviors like lateness to class, inappropriate language, and personal conversations with friends during class time. They added that this behavior was unacceptable in their workforce experiences and that behavior at a job was just as important as the completion of work tasks. The participants made clear demarcations about their teachers' behaviors during class and their supervisors' behaviors a work. John shared:

> My high school teachers would laugh and joke around with us all the time, sometimes we didn't do any work at all in class; my supervisors acted more like my professors. They were there to work, and if you weren't, you got sent home.

Summary

The data collected about the experiences of the participants revealed significant findings about the CCR curriculum content and delivery at the Title I high schools. The data collected were organized into three themes, which were preparedness for college, preparedness for the workforce, and high school environment. The eight subthemes were remedial courses in college, college course rigor, instructional style, behavioral expectations, underdeveloped financial literacy, high staff turnover, unsafe school conditions, and minimal parental involvement. A significant finding was that the CCR curriculum administered at the participants' Title I high

schools did not adequately prepare them for success in college or workforce settings. The overall sentiment from all 10 participants was that the content of the CCR curriculum they experienced was not academically congruent to what they needed to achieve success in college, which was evidenced by the heavy discussion about the need for remedial courses in their freshman year of college. Their need to take remedial courses in addition to their discomfort with the rigor of their college courses and lacking the required college-level technological skills speaks to their lack of preparedness for college settings and the ineffectiveness of the CCR curriculum they experienced at their Title I high schools. Furthermore, the difficult transition from their Title I high school settings to workforce settings, as far as their employers' expectations of professional behavior and work ethnic also spoke to the ineffectiveness of the CCR curriculum content and delivery at their Title I high schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state standard-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. The data collection process included individual interviews, focus groups, and written responses. The culmination of the data from each of these research methods helped to describe the lived experiences of the participants. After the analysis of the research results and development of the findings, the discussion provided a succinct narrative of the themes that related to the experiences of the high school graduate participants who were ARS of low SES and who completed the state standard-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. Chapter Five includes the following subsections: (a) interpretation of the findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research. In addition, Chapter Five summarizes the major themes and subthemes, the central research question, and the two sub-questions.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state standard-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. A phenomenological study was the most appropriate choice for this study for the purposes of identifying shared experiences of individuals within the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological systems theory epitomized the literature, research framework, and analysis of data and findings. Ecological systems theory proposes human development as an ecological system, and all aspects of that system affect an individual's

maturation and development. The three themes identified were preparedness for college, preparedness for the workforce, and high school environment.

Interpretation of Findings

This section is a summary of the major themes from Chapter Four and includes interpretations by the researcher. The purpose of the interpretations is to develop new findings about the experiences of the high school graduates who were ARS of low SES and who completed the state standard-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools. The interpretations work to synthesize and connect the phenomenon, participant experiences, literature, and theoretical framework.

Summary of Thematic Findings

During this study, three major themes and eight subthemes emerged from the analysis of the experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES) who completed a CCR curriculum. The three major themes that were identified were preparedness for college, preparedness for the workforce, and high school environment. The eight subthemes identified were remedial courses in college, college course rigor, instructional style, behavioral expectations, underdeveloped financial literacy, high staff turnover, unsafe school conditions, and minimal parental involvement. The interpretations of these themes were developed under the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological systems theory describes how the environment in which one lives, in addition to laws and practices that govern those environments, have significant effects on the individual's ability to develop cognitively and socially (Crawford et al., 2020; Merçon, 2020). Two thematic interpretations derived from the foundation of Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological systems theory are ecological systems' effect on cognitive development and academic outcomes, and ecological systems' effects on social development and behavioral outcomes.

Ecological System and Cognitive Development Interpretation

Bronfenbrenner (1993) postulated that a key aspect of a person's cognitive development is the condition of their environment, which includes the school setting. He suggested that individuals who are raised in disadvantaged environments could have underdevelopment in their cognitive processes that affect their academic performance. The Title I high schools that the participants attended were located in communities of low SES, and communities of this nature have been economically and socially disadvantaged for generations, which has had negative effect on the cognitive development of the children therein. The findings of this study suggest that the quality of education in the Title I high schools the participants attended mirrored the conditions of the communities of low SES, which resulted in low quality education and the continued cognitive underdevelopment of these students. The purpose of a Title I high school is to equalize education for students of low SES; all of the participants of this study were ARS of low SES and graduated from Title I high schools. They all expressed how, in comparison to many of their same-aged classmates in college courses, they were academically underprepared for that setting. This academic unpreparedness points to the possibility that ARS of low SES who attend Title I high schools are negatively affected by their secondary school setting in a such a way that they are cognitively underdeveloped and thus academically underprepared for postsecondary institutions. In relation to the issue of cognitive and academic under preparedness, low SES and attending Title I high schools in communities of low SES were the linking factors between all 10 participants.

The ecological system and cognitive development interpretation of the lived experiences of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed a standards-based CCR curriculum at Title I high schools focuses on the effect of the content and delivery of the CCR curriculum within a Title I high school setting on the cognitive development of the students

therein. According to the findings of this study, the graduates of the Title I high schools completed a CCR curriculum but were not academically prepared for the college setting, signaling cognitive underdevelopment in the area of academic preparedness for college. The purpose of the CCR curriculum at their Title I high school was to provide them with the content knowledge necessary for success in college courses, however, given that seven of the 10 participants needed to take remedial courses, it is not likely that the content or delivery of their Title I high schools' CCR curriculum provided them with the cognitive development necessary for college courses. Several participants expressed the need for tutors in their first year of college and discussed that the need for this extra assistance in cognitive development was the result of being underdeveloped by their Title I high school education. The hindrances the participants experienced in understanding college course work material and their struggles with handling the amount of work assigned in college courses demonstrates that their high school setting played a role in their cognitive underdevelopment.

Ecological System and Social Development Interpretation

Bronfenbrenner (1993) postulated that a key aspect of a person's social development is the condition of their environment, which includes the school setting, suggesting that individuals who are raised in disadvantaged environments could have underdevelopments in social processes that affect how they interact with others and also, their ability to adhere to the specific behavioral expectations of certain environments. The Title I high schools that the participants attended are located in communities of low SES, and communities of this nature have been economically and socially disadvantaged, which seemed to have negative effects on their social development. According to the data, the social underdevelopment in the Title I high school was akin to that of the communities of low SES in which they were located. The participants specifically sited how the behaviors they were allowed to display in high school were not acceptable in college settings

or workforce settings, and they spoke to the instructional style of the teachers in that setting as enablers of inappropriate behavior.

The data of this study revealed that the school staff in participants' Title I high schools not only delivered subpar content in the classrooms, but they also allowed for behaviors that adversely affected the participants' socialization into college and workforce settings. The participants were allowed to submit homework late, have excessive absences, use profane language, and fight in the classroom, and many of their teachers would ignore those behaviors. The participants mentioned how this type of socialization had adverse effects on their postsecondary outcomes. The data showed that the type of socialization the participants experienced in their Title I high school settings was detrimental to their appropriate socialization skills for workforce settings.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This phenomenological research study provides implications for policy and practice with Title I high school education and the CCR curriculum taught within that setting. The policies and practices suggested include reformations in the Title I high school environment and also, a reevaluation of the course catalog and course content of the CCR curriculum taught in those schools. This involves more consideration for the population of students that Title I high schools serve and the acknowledgment that the current conditions, as well as the curriculum, of the Title I high school environments may have adverse effects on cognitive and social development of the ARS of SES who attend these schools.

Implications for Policy

The findings within this research study provide implications for the policies that govern the CCR curriculum of Title I high schools. At the time of this writing, the set of standards upon which this curriculum is based does not include enough courses or content to assist in the

development of the cognitive or social skills that are necessary for successful postsecondary outcomes for ARS of low SES. Data from this study reveal that although a student may complete the CCR curriculum, there are life skills that have to be learned for the students to have more successful postsecondary outcomes. Money management, personal finance, and professional etiquette are not included in the required courses within that curriculum. The lack of this type of information from the required course content has been shown to be detrimental to students of ARS of low SES, who do not usually receive this kind of education in their households or surrounding communities. Education reformers, curriculum writers, district leaders, and school leaders of Title I high schools should consider how they can better equalize education for ARS of low SES through more inclusion of educational content that accounts for life skill deficiencies that are evident in many students who are ARS of low SES. Analysis of the data of this study points to the fact that although ARS of low SES may complete the CCR curriculum, the content of those courses may not be enough to truly ensure they are ready for college and workforce settings upon high school graduation. Therefore, the implications for policy change is the need for adjustment of curriculum design that is more specific to this population of student in relation to heightening successful outcomes in postsecondary settings.

Implications for Practice

In theory, the education standards that govern the CCR curriculum in Title I high schools culminates in preparedness for college and workforce spaces, but in practice, for ARS of SES, this is not always the outcome. Title I high schools are supposed to equalize the quality of education for students of communities of low SES but in many ways, the curriculum of those schools, the way that curriculum is delivered, and the atmosphere of this school settings do not support the level of cognitive and social development that ARS of low SES need to be truly prepared for college and workforce environments. According to the findings of this study, many

of the behaviors displayed by the adults in Title I high schools are reflective of the negative behaviors found within communities of low SES in which these schools are located, which reinforces the behavioral underdeveloped of the students therein. According to the data analyzed in this study, the behavior of the teachers and the instructional style of the teachers do not reflect that of the behaviors found in postsecondary settings, and it is possible that is a reason why many ARS of low SES are not properly socialized for those settings, even though they complete a CCR curriculum. The findings of this study point to implications of practice for school staff of Title I high schools in that the behaviors and professional practices of staff in these schools impact the appropriate socialization of ARS of low SES into college and workforce settings.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This section explores the theoretical and empirical implications that arose from the findings of this research study. The theoretical and empirical implications are discussed with consideration to previous research in the realm of how Title I high school settings and the standards-based CCR curriculum taught in those settings affect students who are ARS of low SES. This study supports previous research suggesting the major tenets of ecological systems theory are seen in the postsecondary outcomes of ARS of low SES in relation to their experiences in Title I high school settings. Bronfenbrenner' (1993) ecological systems theory places a heavy emphasis on the environment in which a student learns. According to this theory, cognitive and social development is significantly impacted by a students' environment, which includes the learning setting, the materials within the environment, and interactions with the people in that environment.

Theoretical

From a theoretical context, understanding the impact of a student's school environment on their cognitive and social development would allow for specific interventions for populations

of students that are highly concentrated in school settings designed for those students. In communities of low SES, Title I high schools are a highly prevalent, and this phenomenon is unique to communities of this nature. Additionally, the purpose of a Title I school designation is to equalize the education of students who do not usually have exposure to resources such as high-quality education, professional role models who are financially stable, or others factors that lead to desired postsecondary outcomes (Crawford et al., 2020; Merçon, 2020). By understanding how this particular school setting affects students for whom it is designed, it is possible to make the necessary adjustments within the setting that ensure a higher likelihood of these students receiving an education equitable to that of their peers of high SES. Theoretically, if students of disadvantaged households and communities receive a high-quality education in a positive school setting, their experiences in the school setting can provide the level of cognitive development and behavioral socialization they need to counterbalance the cognitive and behavioral deficiencies caused by the disadvantaged conditions of other areas of their ecological environment, including but not limited to their homes and surrounding community. While issues associated with the economic and social disadvantages of their communities might still negatively impact students of low SES, ensuring that their school setting provides a positive atmosphere and curriculum that address their specific needs may heighten the likelihood of these students' ability to elevate to higher socioeconomic classes.

Empirical

Current empirical implications of this study focus the impact of a standards-based CCR curriculum on the students of Title I high schools, to assist in filling the gap in the literature regarding its impact on ARS of low SES in that setting. Similar research discusses the influence of public high schools' CCR curriculum on the college readiness of public school students, but it does not account for its impact on the specific population of ARS of low SES who attend Title I

high schools. This study extends the research on the effectiveness of the standards-based CCR curriculum administered in public high schools by detailing its effect on a specific demographic of student, ARS of low SES, by discussing this topic in relation to their postsecondary outcomes in college and workforce settings. There is a wealth of research on the effects of the CCR curriculum on students in public schools, but ARS of low SES in Title I high schools is a unique population who experience conditions that differ from students of other SES in non-Title I high schools. In that light, this study provides additional information of the impact of the CCR curriculum in relation to a student group for who there is a gap in the literature about public school education reform. It also provides insight into the specific effects of Title I high school settings and of the content and delivery of the CCR curriculum in relation to the outcomes of graduates who were ARS of low SES.

Another empirical implication of this study relates to the investigation of the Title I high school setting and its impact on the development of the students therein. There is a wealth of research about how Title I high schools can improve the cognitive and social development of its students, but there is little research as to if these schools actually do improve such development particularly for ARS of low SES.

This study sheds light on the rate at which Title I high schools actually equalize education for students of low SES and provides insight on this issue through the experiences of the individuals who graduated from that setting. The study offers implications for future research about the specific ways that the environment of the Title I high school setting is different from that of non-Title I high school settings and how the differences in the conditions affect student outcomes, specifically for ARS of low SES.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are two limitations, or potential weaknesses of this study, that could not be controlled. The first limitation was that all the participants of this study went to Title I high schools in the same state, so their experiences may not reflect the experiences of other ARS of low SES who went to schools in other regions of the United States. The second limitation was that although the participants mentioned many similarities in the behaviors of the school staff, every school staff had a different combination of educators and school leadership, so the behaviors of the school staff discussed in this study may not apply to that of all Title I high schools.

The delimitations, or purposeful decisions, to define the boundaries of a study were necessary to limit the focus and scope of the study. Transcendental phenomenology was chosen to give a voice to the demographic that had previously been unheard. This method presents findings without adding interpretation, which allowed the participants' experiences to be shared completely from their perspective. The participation was limited to high school graduates of Title I high schools, so there could be descriptions about graduates of a specific school setting. The participants were all graduates of Title I high schools that professed to employ a CCR curriculum so that the study could specifically explore the postsecondary experiences of graduates who experienced a high school curriculum that specifically addressed readiness for career and workforce settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue to examine the outcomes of students who graduate from Title I high schools. Not all students who attend Title I high schools are students of low SES, and not all students who attend Title I high schools are at risk for dropping out of school. Although these schools are typically located in communities of low SES, there are some Title I high

schools that have a mixture of SES within the student population. To more fully understand the effectiveness of the CCR curriculum administered at those schools, it would be helpful to study this phenomenon from the viewpoint of Title I high school graduates at varying levels of socioeconomic class. Such a study would assist in broadening the understanding of the effectiveness of the CCR curriculum in Title I high schools by comparing the similarities or differences in postsecondary outcomes across different levels of SES. Such a study would help ascertain the curriculum's effectiveness in different groups of students and allow for a deeper understanding of how much socioeconomic class affects how the CCR curriculum is perceived. Additionally, future research should include a comparative study of Title I high schools in different regions of the United States to describe the similarities or differences, if any, between Title I high school settings in different geographical locations.

Conclusion

Although Title I high schools are designed to equalize education between the children of underprivileged communities and the children of affluent communities regarding their ability to achieve successful life outcomes, in many ways, this equalization remains to be seen. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the postsecondary experiences of high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state standard-based CCR curriculum at Title I public high schools. This was accomplished by asking the central research question: What are the shared, postsecondary experiences of Title I high school graduates who were ARS of low SES who completed the state-approved, standards-based CCR curriculum? Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that a person's cognitive and social development is impacted by the conditions of their environment, provided the theoretical framework for this study. While previous literature identified the impact of a standards-based high school CCR curriculum on the outcomes of high

schools, there was a gap in the literature about the impact of that curriculum specific to ARS of low SES who graduated from Title I high schools (Crawford et al., 2020; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Merçon, 2020).

I examined the lived experiences of 10 participants using individual interviews, focus group interviews, and written responses. Three major themes and eight subthemes were identified from the analysis of the participant experiences: preparedness for college, preparedness for the workforce, and high school environment. The eight subthemes identified were remedial courses in college, college course rigor, instructional style, behavioral expectations, undeveloped financial literacy, high staff turnover, unsafe school conditions, and minimal parental involvement. Analysis from the foundation of the theoretical framework demonstrated that the community in which a school is located has a significant impact on the climate of the school and the effectiveness of the curriculum taught therein and that the addition of funds and resources may not be enough to ensure an equalized education. In light of this notion, educational reforms that seek to equalize education for ARS of low SES who attend Title I high schools may need more than a CCR curriculum and a well-funded school setting because these factors, alone may not create an atmosphere sufficient to the students' specific needs.

Children of low SES are at-risk for failing or dropping out of school because of their socioeconomic condition, so they need school settings that cater to their specific needs. The CCR curriculum, as well as the design of the school setting, may not be enough to heighten the likely of successful postsecondary outcomes for these children because they need a school setting that addresses the cognitive and social disadvantages that are particular to people of low SES. Children of low SES who attend Title I high schools need school staff members who understand the conditions of a low SES community and how those conditions create cognitive and social underdevelopment. The children may need a school setting and curriculum that specializes in the

delivery of a CCR curriculum that speaks to the conditions of their type of community, which may need to be considered and addressed in the classroom as well as in the overall climate of the school.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Date: 11-2-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-262
Title: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study Of The Lived, Post-Secondary Experiences Of High School Graduates Who Were At-Risk Students From Traditionally Marginalized Communities
Creation Date: 9-6-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Raquel Grindley
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Review Type	Decision
Initial	Limited	Exempt - Limited IRB

Key Study Contacts

Member	Role	Contact
Raquel Grindley	Principal Investigator	[redacted]
Raquel Grindley	Primary Contact	[redacted]
Sherrita Rogers	Co-Principal Investigator	[redacted]

Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED, POSTSECONDARY EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WHO WERE AT-RISK STUDENTS FROM TRADITIONALLY MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Raquel A. Grindley
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on the postsecondary readiness of students in traditionally marginalized communities. This study aims to examine the experience of Title I high school graduates who were formerly at-risk for dropping out of school, and who completed the state-required, standards-based CCR curriculum designed to prepare students for life in postsecondary settings. You were selected as a possible participant because you graduated from a Title I high school and you are from a traditionally marginalized community. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Raquel A. Grindley, a doctoral candidate in School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of high school graduates who completed the state standard-based college and career readiness curriculum at a Tile I public high school.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Be available for two 30-minute meetings: one-on-one interview and at least one of the two focus group sessions (randomly assigned), that will be video and audio recorded via the Zoom platform.
2. Complete four short written prompts.
3. Review transcripts of the meetings in which you were involved, adding additional notes as necessary.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits:
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a demonstration of why nationwide education reforms that incorporate the perspective of people who experienced the reforms found the most success when students and families of that community were involved in the reform.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a private location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. As per federal regulation, after three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Raquel A. Grindley. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Rogers, at [redacted].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me through the Zoom platform as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant Date

_____

Signature of Investigator Date

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

October 15, 2022

Dear Prospective Participant,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of high school graduates who were at-risk for dropping out of school due to socioeconomic factors, but still graduated from a Tile I public high school. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, be a graduate of a Title I public high school located in northwest Georgia and were considered at-risk for dropping out of school due to socioeconomic factors. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview, to participate in one focus group, and to complete a writing prompt with four questions. Participants will receive the transcripts of their interview and their focus group so that they can review the accuracy of their given accounts. It should take approximately 30 minutes to complete the semi-structured interview, approximately 30 minutes to complete the focus group meetings, and 30 minutes to complete the written prompts. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please complete the attached survey and return it by sending it to me via email at _____@liberty.edu.

A consent document is attached to this recruitment email and it contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to save a copy of the attached consent form to your computer, type your name and the date on the form, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment before the study procedures begin.

Sincerely,

Raquel A. Grindley
Doctoral Student, Liberty University
(___) ___-____

Appendix D: Recruitment Survey

1. Did you graduate from a Title I high school in the southern region of Atlanta, Georgia?
2. If yes, what year?
3. What were your guardians' highest levels of education?
4. Will you make yourself available to participate in a one-on-one interview about your experience with the college and career readiness curriculum at the high school you attended?
5. Are you available to participate in a focus group about your experience with the college and career readiness curriculum at the high school you attended?
6. Are you willing to provide written responses about your experience with the college and career readiness curriculum at the high school you attended?

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself. CRQ
2. Please share the year you graduated from high school. CRQ
3. With as much detail as possible, describe your definition of college readiness. SQ1
4. With as much detail as possible, describe your definition of career readiness. SQ2
5. What were your positive experiences with your high school's college and career readiness curriculum? SQ1
6. What were your negative experiences with your high school's college and career readiness curriculum? SQ1
7. Describe the high school teachers' instructional styles. SQ1
8. Tell me how your high school teachers' instructional styles affected your interest in/readiness for college settings? SQ1
9. Tell me how your high school teachers' instructional styles affected your interest in/readiness for workforce settings? SQ2
10. What are the characteristics of an effective high school teacher at a Title I school? CRQ
11. What do you think ARS should be taught about college and career readiness? CRQ
12. Explain whether or not you feel your socioeconomic status (SES) affected your ability to be successful in a postsecondary institution (college, trade school, certificate program)? SQ1
13. Explain whether or not you feel your socioeconomic status (SES) affected your readiness to enter the workforce? SQ2
14. With as much detail as possible, describe the postsecondary plans you created during your senior year of high school. SQ1
15. What information from the college and career readiness curriculum helped you attain your postsecondary goals? SQ1

16. What recommendations to you have for college and career readiness curriculum writers? CRQ
17. Is there any other information you would want to share with me about your experience with the college and career readiness curriculum at your school or its effect on your postsecondary outcomes? CRQ
18. How involved were your parents/guardians involved in your college or career readiness plans? CRQ
19. How do you feel about your parents'/guardians' role in your high school education? CRQ

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

1. Please describe the most memorable experiences in your high school CCR course. SQ1
2. Tell me about the low points in your high school CCR course experience. SQ1
3. What was your perception of the high school CCR curriculum? SQ1
4. Tell me about your level of comfort in college/ trade school environments? SQ2
5. Describe the connections between your experience with the high school CCR curriculum and your postsecondary experiences. SQ2
6. What challenges have you experienced in postsecondary life? CRQ
7. What is your opinion of the CCR culture of your high school while you were enrolled? SQ1
8. What suggestions do you have for future CCR curriculum developers? CRQ

Appendix G: Written Response Prompts

1. Describe any challenges you encountered with your postsecondary education. SQ1
2. Describe your opinions and thoughts of the college environment in comparison to your high school environment. SQ1
3. Describe any challenges you encountered in finding (or trying to find) employment. SQ2
4. Describe your opinions and thoughts of a professional environment in comparison to your high school environment. CRQ

Appendix H: Audit Trail

Date	Entry: Event/Task/Update
08/14/2022	First version of manuscript sent to SOE for approval.
08/21/2022	Dissertation proposal manuscript approved by SOE.
08/29/2022	Dissertation proposal defense passed and approved.
08/30/2022–09/02/2022	Revised original prospectus of Chapters 1 and 2 to past tense.
09/06/2022	Creation of IRB application on Cayuse.
09/12/2022	Preliminary submission of IRB application.
09/21/2022	IRB application returned for revision.
10/15/2022	Second submission of IRB application.
11/02/2022	IRB approval granted to begin research study.
11/02/2022	Recruitment email sent out.
11/02/2022–11/13/2022	Consent forms received from potential participants.
11/02/2022–11/19/2022	Conducted one-on-one interviews, focus groups and received written responses.
11/14/2022–11/20/2022	Transcribed all interviews. Interview transcriptions sent back to participants to allow for member checks.
11/15/2022–1/21/2022	Transcriptions received back from participants. Themes were coded.
11/21/2022–11/24/2022	Chapter 4 completed. Revised Chapter 3 to past tense. Edited Chapters 1–3.
11/24/2022–11/27/2022	Completed Chapter 5 draft. Edited/revised Chapters 1–5
11/28/2022	Submitted to Chair for review.
12/11/2022	Resubmitted to Chair for review of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 revisions.

Appendix I: Sample Interview

Speaker 1
Thanks so much for being a participant. How are you doing?

Speaker 2
I'm pretty good thank you. How are you?

Speaker 1
I'm doing well, thanks for asking. If you're ready we can get started.

Speaker 2
I'm ready.

Speaker 1
Great. What year did you graduate from high school?

Speaker 2
2014.

Speaker 1
Please describe your definition of college readiness.

Speaker 2
Able to work with others, stay optimistic, and having just a really good support system and being willing to learn and explore different things.

Speaker 1
Awesome. Please describe your definition of career readiness.

Speaker 2
Well, definitely after getting some form of education or learning some type of skill and feeling willing to just start with a career and work towards building a career for yourself. Knowing stuff like how to complete a job application or write a resume and cover letter. Gathering references and stuff like that. None of my high school classes covered that stuff.

Speaker 1
What were your positive experiences with your high schools', college and career curriculum?

Speaker 2
Well, there was actually an engineering program that was at my high school and due to budget cuts, it was no longer was available to us. And there was budget cuts that cut out a lot of what I would feel would be necessary as far as being able to be college ready and career ready. Especially afterschool programs and extracurricular activities. So it pretty much was not the best experience as far as with the high school experience. After those budget cuts came and removed a lot of the programs and afterschool activities that were helping students become ready for college and their career.

Speaker 1
That actually leads into my next question What were your negative experiences with your high school's college and career readiness curriculum?

Speaker 2
Where do I start? There were so many. It definitely didn't match what I needed to get into college and it didn't' teach me about how to be professional are survive in professional spaces. I think there should be a class in there that is about the transition to real life, like how to manage money or how to actually choose a college. My problem too was the way some of the teachers were teaching. I think it not just about what you learn but also how your being taught that effects how good the curriculum is.

Speaker 1
Please describe your high school teachers' instructional styles.

Speaker 2
There was different high school teachers, ones that I really adored and would wish that everyone had as a teacher were the ones that was really understanding. What I mean by that is that they were very patient with their students and when nobody else believed in them, they were the one to believe in the students, even if they didn't believe in themselves. I had a few teachers that treated like I was their daughter, who really cared about me. Other teachers. I feel like maybe due to the budget cuts, maybe it was a decrease in their pay, or even maybe if they were just stretched very thin, they were not as understanding or empathetic or wanting to really be of support system students. So that would be probably one of the negative experience of a high school teacher like that. Some of those teachers just stopped caring about us after a while and others would let students do whatever they wanted in the class.

Speaker 1
How does your high school teacher's instructional style affect your interest in college and career readiness?

Speaker 2
It affected it a lot because if a teacher doesn't believe in you and you know that you need to improve in some form or fashion and they really don't want to sit with you or your parents to talk through the changes, that could be helpful. That can be very hard for a student as far as when they're in high school trying to find their way, especially the most effective learning style for them. So when they go into college and they're more independent, they learn how or they'll know how they learn and how to be successful in college, it also can be isolating, which takes away from that team building component that's very important. I feel like when you're in college and when you're trying to build a career because network is your net worth essentially. So you need to learn how to talk to people and to work with people. And in college you're pretty much trained that you're on an island by yourself and pretty much you have to figure out on your own how to be successful in high school. It can be really burdensome to burdensome for a student to try to, like, overcome those obstacles and find their way and also build a very good career for themselves and also be successful in college, especially if it's a very new environment that they're not used to.

Speaker 1
Thank you, that response actually answered the next two questions. What are the characteristics of an effective high school teacher in a Title I high school?

Speaker 2
I think the characteristics is patience, support, wisdom, and being able to, no matter what they're going through, separate their personal lives with their professional lives and actually want to give back to the student, whether it's helping them learn how to network or know something that would be really useful to students when they're in college. Like if they know, hey, you know, if you go into college for this specific college, this is the person you need to talk to. Or these are resources or don't be afraid to actually try to seek out a tutor because there's one available usually to the school. Tips like that. I think that would be really helpful for a student. So a characteristic is definitely like just wanting to really be there for the

students in a way kind of being like that additional parents that they may need in their lives. Oh I almost forgot they need to be very tech-friendly. Like really integrate tech into their lesson because college professors expect you to know about that kind of stuff. I had access and home so I was comfortable with it but my teachers never really used it in class.

Speaker 1
What do you think at-risk students should be taught about college and career readiness?

Speaker 2
Can you define at risk students?

Speaker 1
Yes. An at-risk student is an individual who is in grade school for the purposes of this study. An individual who's in grade school that is in danger of dropping out of school, usually for different factors. Usually it's socioeconomic factors. So if they're at risk, that means that because of where they come from or the neighborhood that they're in or the family that they have, or the race that they are or the economic status that they have, they have a higher danger of dropping out of school before getting their diploma.

Speaker 2
Cool. Can you repeat the question? I'm sorry. Yeah.

Speaker 1
Sure. What do you think at risk students should be taught about college and career readiness? So if a student is in danger of dropping out of high school specifically because of those socioeconomic factors, what should they be taught about college and career readiness?

Speaker 2
I think they should be taught the different options as far as what's available to them. I feel like there's a lot of resources out there that students are not aware of. Some people don't even know that they can go to a trade school. Some people don't know that they can get education while serving. And some people don't know about the transfer program so that they can go to a college that is maybe not as well known for a couple of years. It will be cheaper, and then they can transfer to another college that is a little more expensive. But at the end of the day they got that stamp on their diploma. I think what is also important that students should learn that our at risk is financial their sleep. I think if they decide to drop off and they are working, they should know how to manage their money because even if they drop off, they can still pretty much get an education. You know, it'll be a harder and more difficult route, but it's definitely possible. And with money being probably one of the resources that will really be helpful to them, since they don't have the traditional route that's on their side, they can really like, really use their money more wisely.

Speaker 2
That will help them still achieve their goals, wherever that may be nontraditional. And I think also what's really important for asterisk students is that I feel like in the environment that's very toxic. They can be trained that the only way to be successful is on this route instead of like other routes or other paths. So making it known to them that, hey, you can be successful if you do this. If you go to trade school and you become an electrician, you can still make six figures. It doesn't have to be athletic or like being an athlete or doing all these other things that they see on television. They can do other that are still going to help them make a lot money and the money can help them achieve whatever dream that they have. They also need to be taught about how much more work they'll have to do once they get to college. One thing I noticed when I got to college was the amount of work I had to do. I took four courses my first semester and it seemed like the amount of work I did in those four courses was more than all my classes in an

entire year of high school. I felt so overwhelmed and it was frustrating because I felt like I never had enough time or energy to study for one of my college classes, let alone four.

Speaker 1
Please explain whether or not you feel your socioeconomic status affected your ability to get into a postsecondary institution. So college, trade school or certificate program?

Speaker 2
It definitely could have. I feel like when I transferred to a college where I graduated from, there was definitely not a lot of representation there and I really had to fight for that transfer. Like, there was an error on my application and if I wasn't upfront and vocal about it, I wouldn't have been able to transfer to that school. And I also feel like even of transferring or getting to a school or whatnot, there was definitely some racism that was present when I got to the destination at the school. And I feel like if I had more of an interview instead of a paper application with my school, I might have experienced that racism during the decision process when they were making a decision on me. I think I'm very fortunate to have characteristics, whether it's my name or my voice or whatnot, that doesn't give away my race immediately. But I feel like if I just had the wrong name or if I spoke differently or in person with the people that were making a decision on my application, it would have definitely impacted me.

Speaker 1
Please explain whether or not you feel your socioeconomic status affected your readiness to enter the workforce.

Speaker 2
Yeah, it's funny because when I graduated, one of the reasons why I wanted to transfer to the school that I transferred to because pretty much people were telling me, hey, if you graduate, it doesn't matter your grades, it doesn't matter all that stuff. You'll have that stamp, whatever. I didn't find that to be completely true for still looking at my GPA, I've had to prove to people that I'm intelligent, and that because I may be a double minority in my industry or my field, that doesn't mean that I'm less of a people to have ever I was talking to. So during the application, like even the application process, again, it's not very telling my race, but when I had the interviews, et cetera, with the people that were making the decision, I really had to make a strong case on why I'm a fit for this role. And right now, still I have some difficulties. Like, I'm thinking about I was thinking about or I'm still thinking about switching careers and maybe getting a new job. That's what I was thinking about before I did this current job. But it was very difficult because people are still kind of wanting to really make that they're making the right decision.

Speaker 2
And I don't know if that's something that everyone experience, but I definitely am aware of it.

Speaker 1
Please describe the postsecondary plans you had created when you were in your senior year of high school.

Speaker 2
Can you define postsecondary plan?

Speaker 1
Postsecondary is anything after high school.

Speaker 2
Oh, okay. So after I graduated from high school, I was still doing dual enrollment, which was doing college well from high school. And during that time, I knew that I wanted to stay at the college that I was

doing dual enrollment with. I actually was working on transferring to another school. But during my time at the college that I was doing dual enrollment with, there was a lot of people that came back from that school that I was applying for, and that's the school that I was applying for. It was the one that I eventually went to England, but there was people saying, hey, I didn't make it in that school and I have to come back. And that's pretty much going to be your future. And I would go to a professor or two and be like, yeah, I'm planning to eventually transfer to this school. And I guess because I was not a straight A student or there could have been other factors to that, they didn't really think that I would be successful after I transferred. So when I think I applied to go to the school right after high school, and I think I was declining the mission and it was really, like, devastating.

Speaker 2
I didn't look more into my application. I probably could have. I have mentors that works at the school that were telling me, hey, I can check on your application and see exactly why this didn't go through, because we think you should have been able to have been admitted. And I said, no, I didn't want to continue trying to get into the school. I didn't feel like I was ready, and I stayed an additional, like, two years at the school I was doing dual enrollment with, and I found out about the transfer program and did that instead.

Speaker 1
What information from the college and career curriculum at your high school helps you attain your postsecondary goals?

Speaker 2
One more time. Can you have the question one more time? Sorry?

Speaker 1
What information from your college and career curriculum in high school helped you attain your postsecondary goals?

Speaker 2
That's a good question. So when it came to before I transferred, I definitely was reading all the flyers and poster boards that were up on the campus, and I think because I read it and found out that way, I didn't even sign out through my counselor. I found out through reading material that was around the school about the transfer program that was available to me at the school. Who wanted to go for an engineering program or engineering degree. I didn't really have a lot of people in my family that were engineers. I didn't know any engineers, really. I was very fortunate to have met a mentor while at high school through a friend of mine who was an engineer and thought that I would be a great role, great fit for an engineering degree. And I was very fortunate to also have some teachers, some good teachers that were in high school that I listened to say, hey, you should definitely consider engineering degree. So when I saw the opportunity, I definitely researched it and I started nagging my account about it. And eventually I got in to the transfer school and I had some unfortunate things happen, but I really just focused on graduating, and I really learned a lot about my learning style.

Speaker 1
What recommendations to you have for college and career readiness curriculum writers?

Speaker 2
I realized after I transferred that school is not to define me by my grade. School is what is supposed to help me learn how to learn, because my education is not going to stop there. It's going to continue on, especially as I build my career observant, really listening to people, especially that are older than me, and then people who really were very willing to be mentors and show me the ropes and tell me about resources that were available and just always looking for opportunities after opportunities really helped with me reaching my goals when it came to my schooling. So those writers need to have a class that helps

students meet people like that or assign people to each student that can help them in that way. Like a mentorship class or internship.

Speaker 1
How involved were your parents or guardians in your college and career readiness plans?

Speaker 2
But my parents were so shocked, and they even mentioned not helping me pay for school. And it was really just kind of sad because I was like, I keep trying to make progress, and I'm hit with all these obstacles as far as being able to get an education. It seemed like they want me to achieve or be, like, succeed, but they are at the same time being an obstacle for me and I don't know why. So eventually they would help out and stuff, but I really had to do a lot of research. I had to look into the scholarship, I found scholarships and had to apply for them. I was still working while in school and stuff like that, so it was not like, easy at all and I really had to be, like, very independent and it was pretty tough, I'm not going to lie. But, yeah, when it comes to my parents, I wish they were a little more supportive, a little more like, filling the confidence in me and saying that I can do stuff instead of not showing that at all.

Speaker 1
Is there any other information that you would like to share with me about your postsecondary experience?

Speaker 2
Yeah, I think when it comes to, like, college, first of all, no matter what college you go to, if people are saying that it doesn't matter your GPA once you graduate and stuff, they're lying. Second at all, I say that because I found out after college, jobs will still look at your GPA within five years of your career. So that's very important. There's no right way of getting your education. I'm trying to talk to my siblings about this. I am the oldest of seven and they're looking like they're not going to be taking the traditional route when it comes to getting their education. And I feel like I'm very fortunate to have had the opportunities that I received when it came to like, me being able to reach my postsecondary goals. But not everybody is like that and, you know, I just want people to be aware that there's no right way. You can do a lot of things and go a lot of different paths that will still get you in the same place that I am today or that you want to be tomorrow. And I want to also share some other resources that I found was very useful.

Speaker 2
I think Junior Achievement is definitely like a program that I would recommend they teach kids entrepreneurship, and I feel like that's where the future is heading. It doesn't seem like jobs are becoming more secure. If anything, they're less secure. And I feel like people are really trying to find ways to help make their child ready for postsecondary schooling, but they're not really focused on how to make sure their kids are independent and don't have to worry. About how they will replace one source of income if anything happens to their jobs that they thought was steady and going to benefit them to retirement. So that's something that I wanted to share also. I wanted to share that mentorship is very, very important. If I learned anything, if there's one thing that can be changed overnight that I feel like will help students, I think having a mentorship program really helps them because it shows representation as someone who can also probably get them into networks that they probably wouldn't have been able to get through or to any other means. And yeah, I really hope that the future for at risk students continue to shine a little bright or a little brighter each day.

Speaker 2
But yeah, it's really tough out here. So I really hope that these resources hopefully become useful and helpful to students.

Speaker 1
Thank you so much. That was a fantastic interview.

Speaker 2
You’re welcome, I hope it helps. Good luck on your studies.

Speaker 1

It definitely helps, thank you so much. Have a good day.

Speaker 2
You too bye bye.