THE TRANSITION FROM DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

A doctoral thesis presented

by

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to

The Graduate School of Education

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

in the field of Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
February 2018
Abstract

In the current higher education environment, understanding how students succeed despite life challenges is imperative for higher education leaders. This research study explores the experience of five students who have successfully completed developmental education courses and have transitioned to be successful in their program of study at a private, non-profit institution. The researcher utilized the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research method. There have been few efforts to document the stories of successful students who have completed developmental education coursework. This qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study included six superordinate themes that the students contributed to their success: flexibility and life balance, family support, motivation for a better life, grit, ability to navigate resources, and confidence.

Keywords: Developmental Education, Higher Education, Remediation, Student Success
Acknowledgements

This doctoral research study would not have been possible without the support of my family and colleagues. Thank you to my husband, Brendan, who supported me through this process over the past five years. I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Joseph W. McNabb, Dr. Kimberly Nolan and Dr. Kelly May for their support and guidance. Thank you to the participants who shared their story with me. I am inspired by their amazing work ethic and dedication to their education. There is much to learn from them, and I am grateful that they shared a piece of their journey with me.
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

In the United States, the enrollment rates in developmental education coursework at colleges have social and financial impacts not only on the students enrolled in developmental education courses, but also on the institutions and the communities which these institutions serve. In 2004-2005, it is estimated that the cost of providing developmental education in public institutions was 1.13 billion dollars (Pretlow III, & Wathington, 2012). Approximately two thirds of all students who are attending community colleges are enrolled in at least one developmental education course (Koloja, 2004). Four-year institutions historically have not offered any developmental education coursework options (Arendale, 2011). While most four-year institutions do not provide developmental education course options, the majority of private institutions do enroll students that need supplemental coursework before beginning college-credit math and writing courses (Paulson, 2011). Since a large subset of students in the United States are enrolling into at least one developmental education course, there is a need to document best practices that can be modified to fit the needs of colleges and institutions based on their student population, resources and culture (Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012).

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experience of students enrolled in developmental education. While there are various aspects that could be explored, scant research focuses on the experience of students who have successfully completed developmental education coursework at private, non-profit institutions.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to developmental education to provide context and background to the study and draws connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement and research question are presented to focus
and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

**Context and Background**

Developmental education reform is necessary to research on a local and national level because each university`s system operates separately while sharing commonalities in practice and concerns (Arendale, 2011; Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012). Taxpayer money is applied to public and non-profit developmental education efforts, so this is a relevant topic for the entire nation (Pretlow & Wathington, 2012). By combining best practices, college administrators will be better prepared to educate and serve their communities in unique ways.

Through analyzing and drawing conclusions from this research, the findings will contribute to the field by allowing practitioners to adapt the research into their daily work with students whether they are teaching developmental education, staff or administrators, or supporting students in developmental education in some capacity. This research could be relevant to all educators as developmental education at the college level, in many instances, is based on the preparation of students in their previous educational experiences.

There are various publications on the number of students enrolling in developmental education coursework in the United States, the financial implications of developmental education, and the support strategies and best practices in developmental education; however, there are areas of research that still need to be further explored, such as the transition students face when entering into developmental education at various types of institutions. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the experience of students enrolled in developmental education at a private, non-profit institution.
The purpose of this research is to capture the experience of students to find themes that can lead to defining best practices. Examining the experience of these students may lead to better understanding of why some students are able to successfully complete developmental education coursework while others are not. With a better understanding of the factors that play a role in these students’ success, college administrators could make programmatic adaptations to better meet these students’ needs. The social and cultural aspect of participant’s lives is the main function of the qualitative approach that will impact change in significant ways at the local and national level (Agee, 2009).

**Problem Statement**

The need for developmental education reform in the United States is significant because of the growing number of students enrolling in developmental education courses that do not count towards the student’s graduation progress and the financial implications to the students, local economy and national budget. The existence of developmental coursework stems from students graduating high school, unprepared for college-level coursework (Frauenholtz & Latterell, 2006). A large subset of students enrolling in college throughout the nation are testing into one or more developmental education courses when they take standardized tests that assess their skills in writing and math (Melguizo, Bos & Prather, 2011). The size of the developmental education enrollment has grown over the past decade at participating colleges from 43% of students enrolling in at least one developmental class in 2004 to 60% in 2010 (Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012).

The cost of developmental education is also a contribution to the necessity of this research. In 2004-2005, it is estimated that the cost of providing developmental education in public institutions was 1.13 billion dollars which is a 13 percent increase since the amount
estimated in the late 1980s (Pretlow III, & Wathington, 2012). Other factors that increase the
need for this research are financial aid guidelines that are becoming stricter to encourage students
to graduate with a bachelor’s degree within four years. When students are beginning college with
three courses that do not count towards college credit, they are set up to lose eligibility for
financial aid by their senior year. Losing financial aid due to enrollment in developmental
education makes it nearly impossible for students from low-income backgrounds to graduate as
affordability is one of the most important factors that impacts retention (Goble, Rosenbaum &
Stephan, 2008).

Graduation from college is not only important for the student but also the local
community as students will contribute more to the workforce and local economy with a college
degree. Researching best practices to assist students in the community to enroll in credit level
coursework more efficiently is important not only for a specific institution and enrolled students,
but also for other similar universities as models of the research could be used to pilot changes in
programming and curriculum changes (Paulson, 2011).

**Research Problem and Research Question**

My research question seeks to explore the experience of students who have transitioned
to begin their college coursework and who are enrolled into at least one developmental education
course:

How do students, who are currently enrolled in credit-level coursework after successfully
completing at least one developmental education course in a private university, explain and make
sense of successfully navigating their experience in developmental education?
Definition of Key Terminology

**Developmental Education:** Developmental education is defined broadly as promoting the cognitive growth of all postsecondary learners (Paulson, 2011). Since the 1800s, American colleges and universities created courses to prepare students who came to college unprepared for college level coursework (Arendale, 2011 & Boylan & Bonham, 2011). The term developmental education has been used since the 1970s; prior to 1970 the term remedial education was commonly used to describe coursework used to prepare students for college-level coursework (Arendale, 2011). The phrase was changed from a deficit way of describing pre-college level coursework to a more positive description.

**Private, Non-Profit Institution:** Private institutions are those that do not receive any state funding for operations. There are relatively few private, non-profit institutions in the United States. According to the National Conference of State Legislators, private institutions often provide flexible scheduling with year-round enrollment, online modality options and small class sizes. These options are attracting a growing population of students entering education including working adults and part-time students (Davies, Preston, & Wilson, 1992).

**Theoretical Framework**

Schlossberg’s 1984 Transition Theory was further developed when partnering with Chickering in 1995 to use the 4 S model to discuss the framework in which an individual moves in, moves through and moves out of a transition. For participants, they experienced moving in to college and developmental education at the same time.

As students move through their first courses and successfully complete them, they move out of developmental education and transition into their program specific courses. Their
experience is described well by Schlossberg’s 4 S model, her description of assets and liabilities and her move in, move through, move out description. Students cope with the transition based on their experience and resources in relation to their self, situation, strategies and support. They move in and move out of a transition in various ways based on their coping strategies, resources utilized, self-efficacy and life situation.

A visual representation of the Move In, Move Through, Move Out model is pictured below detailing the journey of the participants. Each arrow includes relative themes that apply to a student transitioning into college and in and out of developmental education.

*Figure 1. Schlossberg’s Move In, Move Through and Move Out Visual*

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is also described in the graphic below in relation to the emergent themes that were discovered through the interview process. Schlossberg defined four
coping resources: Self, Situation, Strategies and Support. Below each resource are a summary and relevant themes. While each coping strategy is equally important, the participants discussed some of the coping strategies more than others in the interview process. Therefore, for the participants, certain categories were more relevant in their lives than others to cope with their most recent transitions. However, all coping strategies had at least one relevant theme that emerged through the semi-structured interviews.

**Figure 2. Schlossberg’s Framework: 4 S Model**

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory defines a transition as an event or non-event that results in some time of change whether that be a change in relationship, roles or thoughts. The person
experiencing the event or non-event defines the transition in their life. There are a few types of transitions that an individual could experience including anticipated and unanticipated transitions. The participants in the study described experiencing anticipated transitions like beginning college and unanticipated events such as sickness of a child.

The context of the transition involves the setting and the relationship with the transition. For example, in this study, the context involves the college setting. Since the majority of students are enrolled completely online, the students are in various physical locations. The impact of the transition is defined by the degree in which an individual’s day-to-day life is altered. For the participants, their transition into college did have a significant impact on their daily schedule and their life.

Schlossberg describes non-events as transitions that are expected to happen but do not occur. There are four types of non-events that individuals may experience. The first is a personal non-event which is related to an individual’s goals. For the participants, this non-event could be not scoring high enough on the placement test to place into college level math, reading and writing. A ripple non-event involves a non-event of someone else. A resultant non-event is caused by a specific life event. Finally, a delayed non-event is based on anticipation of an event that may still occur in the future.

The 4 S Model that Schlossberg uses to describe the factors that influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition in his/her life. Below each will be discussed in context with the participant interview responses.
Self

Schlossberg identifies the “self” factor as an individual’s personal and demographic characteristics. This includes gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Also, an individual’s psychological state including his/her outlook on life, commitment, values and ego factor into how they cope with a transition in life. An individual’s state of physical and mental health is also an important factor. In this study, the student’s grit, motivation to succeed and their building of their confidence relates to this factor.

Situation

Schlossberg describes the factor of situation as what triggered the transition, the timing of the transition, what control the individual has within the transition and the duration of time. The participants chose to begin college and the timing in which they entered the transition. The trigger of the transition varied by participant, yet the common factor was that they are all looking for advancement in their career and to improve their financial situation. For the participants, they chose a transition into college that allowed them flexibility and the ability to achieve life balance.

Strategies

The strategies are coping mechanisms that individuals utilize in a transition. Individuals who are knowledgeable about resources are able to navigate the transition more easily. There are three categories of strategies: those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the challenge, and those that aid in the managing the stress during and after the transition (Evans, Forney and Guideo-DiBrito, 1998).
Support

The support component of the coping factors is one that applied directly to this research study as participants discussed the support they received from their family in their transition into college. The support extends beyond family relationships to include friends and community. This community can be a physical community in which an individual lives, but it can also include a college community.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Developmental education reform in the United States is a topic that many policy makers and stakeholders are prioritizing for review because of the importance of providing the most effective options for students to complete educational programs and enter the workforce. Developmental education is defined broadly as promoting the cognitive growth of all postsecondary learners (Paulson, 2011). The majority of students who are graduating from high school and enrolling into college are enrolling in at least one developmental education course (Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Paulson, 2011).

The national low success rates in developmental education coursework further validates the need to assess the developmental education system reform as the majority of students that are impacted by the requirement to enroll in developmental education courses are either withdrawing or failing at least one course (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010 & Melguizo, Bos & Prather, 2011; Shields & O’Dwyer, 2017). Developmental education offerings at colleges are needed because the majority of students currently enrolling in developmental education coursework, especially minority students from low-income backgrounds, are not enrolling in college with the skills needed to succeed in college-credit course work (Fraunholtz & Latterell, 2006 & Bailey et al., 2010).
The term “success” itself can be defined in various ways. For some students, simply learning new reading, writing and math skills might mean that the courses were successful in helping them reach their intended outcome. However, most colleges view “success” as when students move from developmental education coursework to college-credit coursework (Goudas & Boylan, 2012 & Bailey et al., 2010). When assessing developmental education, it is important for the researcher to define student success. In the literature, student success is often defined as a student remaining in good academic standing at the college, persisting to the next semester of coursework and transitioning to college-level coursework (Goudas & Boylan, 2012 & Bailey et al., 2010). Most of the literature is focused on the transition to college-level coursework but does not include research on the success of those students once they enroll in college-level coursework (Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Bailey et al, 2010; Frauenholtz & Latterell, 2006).

The following literature review will address three major overarching themes found in the literature related to developmental education reform: history of developmental education support services, successful practices in curriculum design, and the financial implications of developmental education. The purpose of this research is to understand the experience of students who have successfully completed developmental educational coursework to identify best practices regarding how to better support the student population who enrolls in developmental education.

**History of Developmental Education Support Services**

The history of developmental education is deeply rooted in the mission and vision of colleges throughout the nation. Colleges are open campuses which allow students from various academic backgrounds to enroll in coursework (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). As of 2011, there were 1,655 colleges in the United States, enrolling an approximate 6,865,992 students
The majority of students from low-income backgrounds are not graduating high school with high-enough scores on their ACT or SAT assessments to be placed into college level coursework, especially students from diverse backgrounds (Bailey et al., 2010). Therefore, areas that have a high percentage of low-income families have a greater need for effective strategies to assist students in building their skills in reading, English and math.

Since students are entering college with various levels of preparation, most colleges use testing to place students in appropriate courses (Shields & O’Dwyer, 2017). Students who do not score high enough on these examinations to place into college level coursework are placed into developmental education. Some institutions allow students to enroll in college level coursework while enrolled in developmental education coursework, while other colleges require students to complete developmental coursework before enrolling in credit courses. Goudas & Boylan (2012) suggest that most developmental education courses are unsuccessful in assisting students to be ultimately successful. There are also studies that suggest that some colleges are successful with their current developmental education curriculum and support systems.

**Expansion of Developmental Education Coursework**

The size of developmental education enrollment has grown over the past decade at colleges from 43% of students enrolling in at least one developmental class in 2004 to 60% in 2010 (Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012). In order to reform developmental education, understanding the history of why developmental education was created is important. Since the 1800s, American colleges and universities created courses to prepare students who came to college unprepared for college level coursework (Arendale, 2011 & Boylan & Bonham, 2011). The term developmental education has been used since the 1970s; prior to 1970 the term
“remedial” was commonly used to describe coursework used to prepare students for college-level coursework (Arendale, 2011; Paulson, 2011). The phrase was changed from a deficit way of describing pre-college level coursework to a more positive description.

Literature has discussed the dissatisfaction of educators and outside critics regarding how developmental education coursework is accurately preparing students to be more successful in college credit coursework, as programs have grown faster than resources have been allocated at institutions (Brothern & Wambach, 2012; Fike & Fike; 2012; Jaggars & Hodara, 2013). The consequences include students never reaching credit level coursework as the resources provided are not substantial enough to prepare them for college-level coursework (Jaggars & Hodara, 2013). Since most institutions are not fully staffed in developmental education departments, many institutions do not require students to enroll in developmental education coursework after they place into those courses, as students are allowed to take some college credit courses before needing the developmental education coursework (Brothern & Wambach, 2012; Bachman, 2013).

When students wait to enroll in developmental education coursework, they often delay their time to completion. A study by Fike & Fike (2012) found that it is in the best interest for institutions and students if students are required to enroll in developmental education coursework. The study found that students who enrolled in developmental math during their first semester were more successful than those who delayed enrollment when they tracked grade point average and retention in college (Fike & Fike, 2012). Also, students who are not required to take foundation reading and writing classes before enrolling in general education courses are more at risk of failing those courses that are reading and writing intensive (Shields & O’Dwyer, 2017). Therefore, institutions should prioritize scheduling requirements and staff enough faculty
members to support students who need to enroll in developmental education coursework (Fike & Fike, 2012; Shields & O’Dwyer, 2017).

Other issues that have historically impacted students’ success include consistency of developmental education policy through the college and university system (Jaggars & Hodara, 2013). For example, different types of institutions have a wide variety of course credits for developmental classes with varying time required to complete the coursework which makes transferring developmental coursework from one college difficult for students (O’Dwyer & Shields, 2017). In conclusion, consequences include inaccurate placement of students into additional coursework due to insufficient testing, financial consequences and the inability for consistency in transferability of developmental education coursework.

**History of Placement into Developmental Education**

The literature suggests that some institutions across the United States are moving to additional methods to assess students instead of the traditional placement test since the consequences of students enrolling in coursework that is not needed warrant additional methods of assessment (Frauenholtz & Latterell, 2006; Bachman, 2013). States and colleges have different policies governing whether developmental courses are mandatory or recommended, and many colleges are reassessing their policies based on the data that students are often misplaced and unsuccessful after completing developmental education coursework (Wilson, 2012). One of the consequences of the traditional placement tests that are used to place students into developmental coursework is that answering a few questions incorrectly could increase the time needed to complete a degree and create extra financial costs to students, and many placement tests are not incorporating the cultural differences of a diverse population, which creates an extra barrier for a diverse student population (Bailey et al., 2010 & Crisp & Nora, 2010).
Four-year institutions historically have not offered any developmental education coursework, and students who do not meet ACT or SAT score levels are encouraged to complete math and English at colleges. (Arendale, 2011; Brothen, & Wambach, 2012; Shields & O’Dwyer, 2017). However, many institutions have conditional acceptance programs that accept students who may have high grade point averages in high school but low ACT or SAT scores, and these colleges may have specific courses designed to support this student population (Arendale, 2011; Laskey & Hetzel, 2011). Therefore, colleges and many four-year institutions both have investments in exploring the experience of students in pre-college coursework and developing best practices to meet the need of this population. Administrators, faculty and staff across the higher education sector have a vested interest in assisting students who enter college with low math, reading and English scores as this occurs at any type of institution.

Conclusion

In order to reform developmental education and implement best practices, the first step is to seek to understand the history of why developmental education became necessary in the United States. While community colleges have historically been the type of institution to offer developmental education, private and public four-year institutions have begun to admit students through conditional acceptance programs. Therefore, developmental education research and best practices is important for all types of institutions. As various types of institutions are examining their developmental course options, it will be important that decisions are made with historical data and that appropriate resources are allocated to developmental education curriculum and support services.

As the awareness of the need for developmental education has dramatically increased over time, the research in the field has not kept up with the demand which has resulted in many
colleges allocating insufficient resources to assist students. In order for there to be improvements in developmental education offerings, colleges will need to understand the historical significance of developmental education to predict the needs of this student population in the future. If the historical trend continues, the need for developmental education curriculum is increasing with time.

**Successful Practices in Developmental Education**

The literature on developmental education suggests that additional out-of-the-classroom support such as tutoring and mentoring is critically needed (Brothen & Wambach 2012; Asera, 2011; Saxon & Slate, 2013). One support strategy that is commonly referred to in the literature is the use of interactive curriculum design such as co-requisite models and supplemental tutoring support (Di Tommaso, 2012; Diaz, 2010; Pinkerton, 2010). Another best practice includes free mentoring programs and mandatory workshops or interactive community sessions (Di Tommaso, 2012). Tinto (1993) argues that central to a student’s retention is their ability to socially and academically integrate to the university. Drop outs increase with low commitment to integrate to the college community (Tinto, 1993).

Studies have shown that peer to peer support is critical for students in developmental education to build their confidence and motivation to succeed (Pinkerton, 2010; Di Tommaso, 2012). Pinkerton (2010) found that group support was the defining factor of success among students in developmental education reading. Another support that is discussed as an option to assist students in developmental education is making pathways for students through the developmental education sequence. In one study, students in developmental education were given options of pathways to select for course material based on their interests and career goals.
The results from the study found that building pathways is a difficult process and evidence of learning objectives is key to success (Asera, 2011).

Multiple studies have demonstrated the importance of student services and timely completion of developmental coursework (Bremer et al, 2013; Pinkerton 2010, Asera, 2011). Bremer et al. (2013) address two questions to assess best practices in developmental education. The first question involves measuring outcomes such as retention and grade point average of students in developmental education coursework and comparing these outcomes to students that are enrolled in only college-credit coursework. The second question involves examining if students are more successful when they enroll in developmental education coursework in their first semester of college. Multiple studies highlighted that support options like tutoring, mentoring, and financial aid impacted student success more than enrolling in developmental education and did not find a significant difference in success of students who enrolled in developmental education and those who were not enrolled in developmental education (Bremer et al, 2013, Pinkerton, 2010, Asera, 2011). While advising is an important resource for all students in higher education, students enrolled in developmental education who utilize advising typically report a positive connection to that advisor and support staff (Walker, 2008). This advising could be with a peer advisor or professional advisor. The most important factor in the advising relationship is that the advisor focuses on building the strengths of the student (Walker, 2008).

Bremer et al. (2013) found that students who enrolled in developmental education in the first semester had higher retention rates in the second semester, yet these findings did not continue into the third semester. From these studies, one can conclude that the developmental education system is only one factor that affects student success and retention and support
systems such as tutoring and financial aid can affect a student more than the curriculum itself (Pinkerton, 2010; Asera, 2011; Bremer et al., 2013)

**Curriculum Design**

Courses with high failing rates often are not engaging and do not allow the student to interact with the subject material (Swan, 2001; Bolliger, 2004). Capt and Oliver (2012) examined how faculty instruction influenced student learning in developmental education coursework. Their findings suggest that when faculty members embrace diverse learning styles, students succeed at higher rates. Active participation by students and an interactive learning environment were preferred by students and learning was greater. The literature suggests that when faculty members use course material that relates to students' lives and career interests, students are able to grasp the main concepts needed to move to college-credit coursework (Capt & Oliver, 2012; Vasquez, 2010). Faculty members are integral in the success of curriculum changes in developmental education; their expertise and willingness to use best practice models are key to the success of developmental education reform. Capt and Oliver (2012) noted that most college faculty in their study did not expect to be teaching developmental education as they were not told when they were hired that they would be teaching pre-college courses. This is an issue that may extend past the college as many colleges utilize their full-time math, English and reading faculty to teach developmental education courses as part of their course load without additional training (Chung, 2005).

When faculty members evaluate the course outcomes and effectiveness of support strategies in their programs, students are more likely to persist from the first developmental education course to the next or to college-level coursework (Melguizo, Bos, & Prather, 2011; Baer & Duin, 2014). Faculty and staff have a responsibility to describe the students' pathway
from developmental education to college-level coursework (Baer & Duin, 2014). Students succeed when they understand the resources available to them as well as the reason why the curriculum is important to their overall program and development (Melguizo, Bos, & Prather, 2011; Baer & Duin, 2014).

Faculty members also need support and administration and staff since many adjunct faculty members do not spend much time on campus and therefore cannot provide additional tutoring or support to students in their courses (Melguizo, Bos & Prather, 2011). Administration at colleges could coordinate meetings between developmental education faculty members and invest in professional development and training opportunities to better support faculty and students enrolled in developmental education courses. Support for developmental education staff is equally important as the support systems in place as this will improve instruction quality; training should be incorporated into every developmental education program that includes feedback and role playing with staff so that best practices and ideas are shared within the division (Vasquez, 2010).

**Online Modality and Adaptive Learning**

Many traditional four year public institutions, community colleges and private institutions have begun to expand their online course offerings (Bolliger, 2004). This includes options to complete developmental education coursework nationwide in a variety of platforms. While some institutions are utilizing more traditional online platforms, others are beginning to expand coursework to adaptive options that change the focus on course material based on the students` prior knowledge (Chen, Gonyea & Kuh, 2008). Multiple studies have found that students are most successful when the educational experience is personalized to their knowledge and preferences (Swan, 2001; Bolliger, 2004; Chen, Gonyea & Kuh, 2008). This personalization
is only beneficial if students understand the technology and if faculty are well equipped to teach using this new tool.

**Out of Classroom Support**

The literature on developmental education suggests that implementing support strategies to assist students is vital in the success of developmental education reform (Brothen & Wambach 2012; Asera, 2011; Saxon & Slate, 2013). One support strategy that is commonly referred to in the literature is the utilization of learning communities to support students in the developmental education sequence (Di Tommaso, 2012; Diaz, 2010; Pinkerton, 2010). Learning communities are defined as support networks of students who are in courses together with the same instructor and who also have a support component that includes tutoring and group learning. Not only do learning communities provide consistency for the students, but the students also start to feel that they are part of a group which aids in retention and self-esteem (Di Tommaso, 2012).

Research studies have found that resources such as tutoring and financial aid can affect student success more than the curriculum itself (Di Tommaso, 2012; Bremer et al., 2013). The sequencing of courses and structure in course pre-requisites was also a key factor in student success (Bremer et al. 2013; Pinkerton, 2010). One study found that the sequence enrolled in developmental education in the first semester had higher retention rates in the second semester, yet these findings did not continue into the third semester (Bremer et al., 2013). A study by Fike & Fike (2012) found that students who delayed enrolling in developmental math delayed graduation and were not as successful as students who enrolled in developmental math courses their first semester. Boylan (2011) conducted a random sample of 160 community colleges and four-year institutions. The results from the study showed that retention rates were higher when placement was mandatory and success rates were higher when counseling was available. These
studies suggest that intensive counseling and academic advising should be made available and that structured sequencing and placement should be mandatory for this population (Boylan, 2011; Bremer et al., 2013). Another best practice is to use supplemental instruction in developmental education courses. Supplemental instruction is defined as tutors attending courses and reviewing materials in study groups (Sheldon & Durdella, 2010). Students can feel less intimidated by asking questions to students and be more open to discuss concerns they have about the course material. Mentoring and supplemental instruction is vital to providing important peer support (Sheldon & Durdella, 2010; Boylan, 2011; Bremer et al., 2013).

Underrepresented student populations could also be affected differently by developmental education policies and practices. Crisp and Nora (2010) examined how the Hispanic population was affected by developmental education. The study found that Hispanic students felt disengaged in developmental education courses and often unsupported. Mentoring programs and specialized tutoring were support systems that these students identified as important. Further research on specific populations of students based on ethnicity, gender and age could be helpful in creating changes in developmental education reform as populations of students might be affected differently based on a variety of factors. Goldschmidt, Ousey, & Brown (2012) examined the additional barriers that immigrant students are experiencing when enrolling in developmental education coursework. The study found that students with language barriers were often enrolling in developmental education coursework for a lengthy amount of time and some students never made it to college-credit coursework. This population should be further researched as many students with language and cultural barriers will continue to attend community colleges in the United States.
As private non-profit institutions and community colleges are accessible to all student populations, they are colleges with the most diverse populations. As students are coming to these types of institutions with various levels of preparation and goals, the completion rate at most of these colleges is lower than other public and private four-year institutions. Only 33% of students enrolled at these colleges obtain a credential within six years (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2006). Since only 33% of the entire average student population at open access colleges are completing their degrees, the rate would most likely be much lower examining the population of students who begin in developmental education coursework. This is a nation-wide problem as students throughout the United States, especially in urban areas, are graduating high school and not scoring high enough on their ACT/SAT scores or placement tool that the college provides to place into college-level coursework (Bettinger & Long, 2005 & Daiek et. al, 2012).

Conclusion

The literature suggests that a successful developmental education curriculum is only one factor that affects student success and retention, and support systems such as tutoring and financial aid can affect a student more than the curriculum itself. Support systems such as learning communities and tutoring can be paired with developmental education coursework to supplement the in-classroom learning. Course sequencing and mandatory placement are also essential for student success. Students from diverse backgrounds may need additional support such as peer-mentoring and intrusive academic advising.

Support for developmental education staff is equally as important as the support systems in place as this will improve instruction quality; training that includes feedback and role playing with staff should be incorporated into every developmental education program so that best practices and ideas are shared within the division. Support systems such as tutoring, mentoring
and supplemental instruction should also be used to assist faculty to support students in their courses. These best practices should be adapted for use at colleges across the nation.

Financial Implications of Developmental Education

With the increased cost to the nation, there is a responsibility of every college to be fiscally responsible and maximize the dollars used in developmental education funding. As the government is moving towards performance based funding, colleges will be under even more pressure to ensure students have tools to stay in good academic standing, persist and eventually graduate while maintaining high academic standards and integrity (Brothen & Wambach, 2012). Students who enroll in developmental education are eligible for financial aid only if they have the “ability to benefit” which is taken from federal guidelines in 2011 from the Department of Education. This legislation established federal aid eligibility and required a student to either have a high school diploma, GED, or a minimum passing score on an approved placement test before receiving aid (Sullivan & Nielsen, 2013). This requirement mandates that universities collect evidence of high school diploma, GED or placement test before dispersing aid.

Financial Impact on Institutions

In 2004-2005, it was estimated that the cost of providing developmental education in public institutions was 1.13 billion dollars which was a 13 percent increase over the amount estimated in the late 1980s (Pretlow III, & Wathington, 2012). With the increased cost to the colleges and taxpayers who fund public colleges, there is a responsibility of every college to be fiscally responsible and maximize the dollars used in developmental education funding. As the government is moving towards performance based funding, community colleges will be under even more pressure to ensure students have tools to stay in good academic standing, persist and
eventually graduate while maintaining high academic standards and integrity (Brothen & Wambach, 2012).

The ability to benefit regulation is regarded by some as a “regressive view” of the cost of developmental education as it requires colleges to not count these credits towards a degree and to not allow aid to be applied for students who have not heard a high school diploma or GED (Sullivan & Nielsen, 2013; Pretlow III, & Wathington, 2012). As most open-admission institutions accept a significant proportion of new students that do not place into college-level coursework, many of these students might struggle to finish their degrees in enough time to have federal financial aid pay the college (Sullivan & Nielsen, 2013; Pretlow III, & Wathington, 2012). Many colleges provide scholarships for students who start in developmental education to assist them to complete their degrees as accreditation agencies are holding open-admission institutions responsible for graduation rates of their entire population (Sullivan & Nielson, 2013). This cost adds up for institutions with a high proportion of students enrolling in developmental education with high financial need.

Financial Impact on Students

Although the financial implications of the colleges themselves are highlighted publicly, there is less knowledge of how developmental education impacts students’ financial aid for those not directly involved in the process. Students are often delayed two or more semesters before they are able to begin the required college-credit courses required for their degree which can have negative financial consequences for students (Gallard, Albritton & Morgan, 2010). The majority of students from low-income backgrounds are not graduating high school with high-enough scores on their ACT or SAT assessments to be placed into college level coursework, (Bailey et al., 2010).
Due to Department of Education regulations, financial aid is only available for students for the first 120 credit hours of academic credit. Since developmental education courses can require up to 20 credit hours of academic courses, students enrolled in developmental education could potentially pay out-of-pocket for at least one semester of courses, which is especially difficult for students from low-income backgrounds. Institutions are becoming creative in funding support systems in developmental education by using grant money from Title III grants from the Department of Education to assist students through developmental education since many students who are from underrepresented populations are enrolled in developmental education courses (Gallard, Albritton & Morgan, 2010).

The cost sharing model includes family contribution, government assistance and student contribution (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). The majority of students who test into developmental education are from low income families. However, not all of these students are eligible for government assistance especially those who are undocumented Unites States citizens. These students are required to pay out of pocket for their educational costs, and many begin in the lowest levels of developmental education based on language barriers. Often, their families might not be able to contribute financially to their education especially if they are not in the United States (Vossensteyn, 2009).

Institutions are becoming creative in funding support systems in developmental education by using grant money to assist students through developmental education since many grants are reserved for institutions with high percentages of students from low-income and minority backgrounds. Since there is a large number of students who are from underrepresented populations that are enrolled in developmental education courses, institutions can use this grant
money to provide additional support to help them successfully complete their developmental education coursework (Gallard et al., 2010).

**State Solutions**

Many states including Texas and Colorado are making policies that are decreasing developmental education enrollment at colleges (Saxon & Slate, 2013). In Texas, for example, students who successfully complete English coursework with a grade cutoff are eligible to begin college level coursework without taking a placement test. Colleges across the nation are beginning to partner with local high schools to share curricula so that if a student passes a high school class with the same curriculum as the developmental education coursework, then they will receive credit for completing the college class and be able to start college-credit work if enrolling at the college (Asera, 2011). These partnerships are vital especially in low-income communities where there are a larger percentage of students.

According to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education Legislative Report on Remedial Education in 2010, local colleges in Colorado are partnering with high schools to provide placement testing to high school students and then collaborating on curricula to assist students to be college-ready by the time they graduate. This provides a guarantee to the high school seniors that as long as they graduate from high school, they will begin in college-level coursework if they enroll in their local college without a requirement to take another placement test.

**Conclusion**

There are financial consequences for individual students and the nation for unsuccessful developmental education programs. Students have limited funding availability through grant and
loan programs, and developmental education courses count towards their funding eligibility. By working with middle schools and high schools, colleges can assist the community in preparing students for college-level coursework. Innovative ideas like those that these states have created not only have a positive financial implication on students, but also communities, as they save tax revenue since taxes pay for part of the college and high school systems.

When students are successful without needing to take out loans or use up their financial aid for courses that do not count towards graduation, the financial benefits impact the entire community. As students complete their developmental education courses and graduate in a timely manner, they have a better chance of a rewarding career that will lead them to earn more money and contribute to their communities. Therefore, it is imperative for colleges to find creative solutions to assist students to successfully enter into college-level coursework and to provide the resources to succeed once they are enrolled.

Summary

Evidence in the literature concludes that although developmental education is needed to provide access to higher education, there needs to be reform to increase transparency and validity in the developmental education system in the United States (Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Bailey et al, 2010; Frauenholtz & Latterell, 2006). The consequences of not improving the developmental education placement, curriculum and resources throughout the college systems could cost the United States its status as leader in providing quality higher education opportunities that are accessible to a diverse population (Levey, 2006; Fike & Fike, 2012)

As many types of colleges are open access institutions including community colleges and many private colleges, it is vital that these colleges are prepared to serve students from all
educational and diverse backgrounds (Paulson, 2011). However, providing the courses is not enough if over 40% of students are enrolling in developmental education, and the majority of these students are not completing these courses to enroll in credit-level coursework (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). Additional support for these students is needed to not only increase their chance of success in these courses but also to connect them to the campus and increase their self-efficacy (Koch, Slate, & Moore, 2012).

The financial implications for the students, colleges and the communities they serve are too high to not invest in developmental education reform and best practices (Gallard et al., 2010; Pretlow III, & Wathington, 2012). While there are best practices and support systems that are commonly referenced in the literature, such as learning communities, pathways in developmental education, tutoring and alternative teaching methods, college leaders need to evaluate the needs of students on their individual campuses since students need various levels of support depending on the needs of each community. Since each study is contextualized in the culture and resources of the college where the study was conducted, generalizations cannot be made. However, collaboration between all education partners in each state and region can improve the current developmental education system.

As colleges are held more accountable for graduation rates, college policy makers will be forced to examine developmental education policies and support services to provide access while also not hindering student completion by additional coursework. Colleges historically have low graduation and transfer rates, and a way for colleges to increase the success of students is to examine how to improve developmental education policies and pathways to college-level coursework (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). One reason for historically low graduation rates at colleges is that not all students plan to graduate from colleges, but there is still a large population
of students who intend to finish their degree that withdraw from courses (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006).

Another common theme that emerged in the literature is that there are consequences for students to need to complete developmental education in regards to the length of time needed to complete their degree and the implications of using their financial aid money to pay for courses that are not counting towards their degree completion (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Koch, Slate, & Moore, 2012; Asera, 2011). The consequences not only affect the students themselves, but also the colleges and community as graduation rates are lower since students are not persisting from developmental education to college-credit classes. Although students might be learning basic skills in these courses, they are not becoming qualified for the workforce, which creates long-term effects on the local communities (Gallard et al., 2010).

The literature supports the notion that students are most successful in developmental education coursework when there are changes to curriculum based on the unique student populations and culture at the institution (Asera, 2011; Sheldon & Durdella, 2010). Generalizations cannot easily be made since most studies and research is qualitative and contextualized within the environment and participants. However, the research and studies should not be dismissed as irrelevant to all colleges in the United States because commonalities can be identified and policy makers can learn from the researchers’ conclusions and implications for further research.

The overarching themes found in the literature, including the need for developmental education curriculum and resources, the financial implications of developmental education, need for out-of-classroom support, best practices in developmental education, and the perspective of students demonstrate the scope of the impact of developmental education curriculum reform
The quantitative and qualitative studies demonstrated the need for accurate placement and for supplemental support for students in developmental education coursework (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006 & Bettinger, & Long, 2005 & Sheldon & Durdella, 2010).

The financial implications of developmental education should further motivate colleges to begin or expand collaborations with local K-12 institutions to model efforts that have resulted in success in various school districts throughout the United States (Gallard et al., 2010 & Saxon & Slate, 2013). Administrators, faculty members, and staff at colleges, middle schools and high schools could benefit from implementing best practices and support services for students in urban communities that have historically had high placement into developmental education. By working together, administrators and faculty can assist students to either not need developmental education or to be successful in developmental education and move towards credit-level courses efficiently.

Students enrolled in developmental education coursework are at a greater risk of not graduating from college, but students from diverse backgrounds are at an even greater risk for not being retained by urban colleges. As many colleges are open access institutions, there is a responsibility of these colleges to serve their student population by meeting students where they are and educating all who enroll (Arendale, 2011; Paulson, 2011). The best practices cited throughout this literature review should be utilized and adapted by college administrators, faculty and state and federal policy makers to meet the needs of students enrolled in developmental education coursework.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study seeks to answer the following question: How do low-income students, who are currently enrolled in credit-level coursework after successfully completing at least one developmental education course in a private university, explain and make sense of successfully navigating their experience in developmental education? This research seeks to understand how these students explain and make sense of their experience in developmental education. Qualitative research is appropriate when research aims to “minimize the power relationship” between the participants who are sharing their story and the research (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). As the purpose of the research is to share students` stories, a qualitative research model best aligns with the study focus.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is ideal for this research topic as the purpose of my study is to understand an experience through learning about students’ experiences. Researchers use qualitative research to understand experiences and actions of humanity (Elliot, Rischer & Fennie, 1999). Creswell (2013) and Seidman (2006) qualitative design suggestions include the researcher utilizing open ended questioning, probing and follow-up questioning.

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm recognizes the existence of multiple realities, it focuses on the participant’s reality (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivists state that reality is self-defined and place value on the relationship that transpires between the researcher and the participant. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) fits into the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm because the participant’s story is told through their words and description of their personal experiences.
The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is unique to other qualitative methods as IPA is grounded in the theory of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. IPA is a methodology that focuses on an in-depth view of a specific experience on a personal level. In IPA, “voice” is given to a particular perspective (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Through IPA, the researcher is not seeking to establish the eidetic structure, or essence of experience. Instead, the focus is on real world context through the individuals experience (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

Even though IPA is a modern methodology introduced in the 1990s, it has been used widely in qualitative research since the first study was published in a psychology journal (Smith et al., 2009). This methodology called for a significant shift from focusing on quantitative inquiry and has become well known in the social sciences. Smith et al. (2009) describes how IPA is grounded in phenomenology, the “lived world” of the participants (p. 11). Phenomenology is the study of describing a participant`s phenomenon, a significant event or phase in their life (Chase, 2011). By interviewing multiple individuals who have experienced a similar phenomenon such as completing developmental education coursework, the researcher can explore trends, shared experiences and differences in participant`s perspectives.

There are two types of phenomenology that researches utilize in studies, descriptive and interpretative (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). Husserl, a philosopher, is well known for defining descriptive phenomenology as he advocated for research that details an experience to transcend society`s assumptions (Smith et al., 2007). The term “bracketing” is an important part of this research as it requires the research to identify biases and to focus on limiting those assumptions to appreciate the phenomenon. Descriptive phenomenology places value on identifying the
essential elements of an experience which can also be referred to as transcendental phenomenology (Smith et al., 2007).

Interpretative phenomenology is associated with Heidegger who was a student who learned from Husserl (Connelly, 2010). Interpretative phenomenology focuses on explored consciousness and is more interpretive than descriptive phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009; Dowling, 2007). Heidegger was interested in a deeper understanding of the information shared by the participant opposed to the description of the experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics is related to Heidegger`s version of phenomenology as it focused on complex relationships and the interpretation of those relationships in the world. While shaping questions in IPA, the researcher can use a combined approach of descriptive and interpretative phenomenology to shape the interview questions to identify the essential elements of the phenomenon and a deeper understanding of the participants’ perspectives.

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation in which research seeks meaning through finding meaning that emerges that may be hidden at first (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher`s role is to bring the phenomenon to light and make meaning through analysis. This process of detecting themes requires multiple avenues of unfolding the complexity of human experiences (Smith, 2004). Since the same individuals are interviewed multiple times to uncover their lived experiences and dig deep into their stories, researches using IPA as a methodology usually involve less participants than other research methods. In IPA, a double hermeneutic approach is used in which there are two stages to the research. The participant and the researcher are both making sense of the participant`s experience at the same time (Smith & Eatough, 2007). This challenging task can be accomplished by blending the techniques of empathetic and critical hermeneutics which involves the researcher balancing seeing the experience through the
participant’s lens and separating oneself from the participant’s experience (Smith & Eatough, 2007). By combining these two approaches, the researcher is able to interpret the full experience of the participation in a multidimensional way (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

Lastly, IPA is shaped by idiography which focuses on the attention to detail (Smith et al., 2009). Through IPA, researchers focus on a specific phenomenon and the specific experiences of their participants. The researcher has the responsibility of highlighting the similarities and differences of the participant’s experiences by highlighting the unique highlights of each participant’s story. This is important as the subtle details are valuable in qualitative research (Smith, 2004).

**Rationale for Utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is the most appropriate methodology for my research as it seeks to understand the participant’s experience through a combination of techniques including building trust with the participant, allowing the participant to go into detail about their lived experience and follow up with the participants. This approach shapes the research questions asked as each participant will be interviewed multiple times. Prior to the interviews beginning, researchers build trust with the participants using the IPA methodology. By explaining how the student’s story matters and how their information will be kept confidential and safe, the researcher sets up a safe environment for the participants which will lead to deeper conversations (Creswell, 2013). IPA research is the most appropriate research method to understand how participants understand their lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA research is utilized to make sense of the participant’s life experience and thus capturing the stories (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).
This study, an exploration of low-income students who have completed developmental education at a private, non-profit institution, is best aligned with the IPA methodology because of the flexibility that IPA allows for themes to emerge through the interview process. As these participants have all experienced enrolling in and completing developmental education, they have a shared experience to discuss that means something to them personally (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). IPA research includes an in depth analysis of participant`s descriptions of their experience and perspectives. This is important to this research study as the participant`s individual stories and shared themes will be utilized to determine how the student transitioned from developmental education coursework to college-credit coursework using Schlossberg`s Transition Theory (1984).

The individual factors that could impact a student`s transition vary from the support they receive in their personal lives and in college as well as which resources they utilized. While there are bound to be differences in their transition, there are some common themes that can be used to inform practice and contribute to the field of developmental education reform.

Participants

IPA research is best utilized when a sample of individuals are interviewed that can speak to their personal experiences about the research topic (Smith et al., 2009). A uniform sample is best suited for IPA research in that the group will have a shared experience yet unique perspectives to the same event (Smith et al., 2009). The participants in this study are five students from low-income backgrounds who have completed at least one developmental education course and have enrolled in college credit-coursework at a private, non-profit institution. This sample size is commensurate with current studies which have used IPA (Biggerstaff, & Thompson, 2008; Moore, 2005). Participants were identified by pulling a degree
audit of all students who have completed at least one developmental education course that are enrolled in a college-credit course. The report was filtered by funding status to exclude any students with high expected family contributions that would not qualify for income-based aid.

While age and gender are not directly relevant to this study, the sample population interviewed does represent the non-traditional population at the university. A student`s family educational background, current and past socioeconomic background may impact their view on their own abilities and experience in developmental education. Therefore, selecting a sample group of students that represents the population was imperative.

The average age of the students enrolled at the private, non-profit institution that I conducted my study at is approximately 35 years old. These students have significant life and work experience that may contribute to their perspective on their enrollment and experience in developmental education coursework. The male to female ratio at the institution is 1:3, so therefore, more females were invited to participate in the study based on the pool of eligible participants. Below is a table of the participant demographics including the participants` age, program of study, current grade point average and number of credit hours each participated has completed.

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Credit Hrs. Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
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<td>Associate of Science in Information Technology</td>
<td>3.62</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Degree Program</td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sampling Procedures**

The purposive sampling method was utilized in this research study as participants are needed that are able to speak to their transition through the developmental education sequence into college level coursework (Creswell, 2013). As IPA research requires an in depth discussion with participants, only 4-10 participants will be selected as each participant will be interviewed at least three times resulting in at least 24-30 interviews (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling is ideal for IPA research as all participants have experienced a specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

Since the participants live in various locations, the traditional focus group option would not be possible in person. Therefore, individual interviews were the primary method of research for this project.

Participants were recruited in the following steps:

1. An initial recruitment email (see Appendix A) was sent to all students who were identified as low-income students who have successfully completed developmental
education coursework and are actively enrolled in college credit coursework. The email was sent from Northeastern account to ensure the separation between the research and the support role at the institution.

2. The researcher sent the consent form (Appendix C) to the interested students and set up an initial meeting via Blackboard Collaborate, Skype, GotoMeeting or phone based on the participant’s preference. The researcher offered to answer any questions before the initial meeting and ensured the participant knew that they may choose to opt out of the interview process at any time.

Research Site

Students were interviewed that live in various geographic regions across the United States. Since the research site is a private, non-profit institution that offers enrollment to any student in the United States, the participants were invited to participate in interviews using video chat features such as Skype, Blackboard Collaborate or Go To Meeting as well as the option for phone interviews based on the participant’s preference. There were students who volunteered to participate that live in the Wisconsin region, so the researcher also gave the option to meet with the student in person at one of the three local campuses. No participants selected that option. All participants were sent a $15 gift card for their time at the conclusion of the interview and member checking process.

Procedures

The IPA methodology shapes each aspect of the research design including the research questions. This study’s method of collection of the data and analysis follows the recommended
IPA research procedures and are described in detail in the following sections: data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, potential research bias, and limitations.

**Data Collection**

Before data collection occurred, IRB approval was secured by Northeastern University and, the research site, a private, non-profit institution. All interviews were recorded with the permission of each participant using two digital recording devices in case of any technical errors. There were three phases that the researcher facilitated during the data collection. Prior to the interviews, the researcher created an interview guide (Appendix B) and conducted a pilot interview test (Seidman, 2012). The guide was designed to be semi-structured to allow for some flexibility to allow for new questions to emerge throughout the process but structured enough to maintain an organized format (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Eutough, 2007). The researcher utilized a modified Siedman approach including a preliminary interview in phase one, an in-depth interview in stage two, and a third interview was used for member checking in phase three (Siedman, 2012).

**Phase One.** In phase one, the initial interviews were set up with the participants who responded to invitation. This first meeting was approximately between 20-30 minutes. In the first meeting, the study was described in detail and the researcher gave the opportunity to the participants to ask questions. Informed consent was obtained at this time (see Appendix C). Demographic and other background information was collected from participants who gave their consent to participate. In this phase, the researcher began to build trust and rapport with the participants. All participants were given the option to choose their own pseudonym which will be used to protect the identity of the participants during the research process and aid in building trust (Creswell,
The researcher maintained a file that is password protected that will hold the participant’s personal information and pseudonyms.

**Phase Two.** The first in-depth interview was conducted in phase two with five participants. The questions asked were semi-structured, open-ended questions, and the researcher focused on active listening and encouraged the participant to make meaning of their experience with the phenomenon (Rubin. & Rubin, 2012; Smith et al, 2009). The researcher transcribed each interview at this phase in order to process the information and ask appropriate follow up questions in the subsequent interviews. The interviewer used a third party site, rev.com, to transcribe the interviews. The participants were made aware that this was how the interviews would be transcribed before they gave their consent to be interviewed.

**Phase Three.** Each participant was sent the transcription of their first interview, and each participant was asked to validate the researcher’s interpretation of transcript (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then set up additional time with all participants to verify that the information provided is representative of their perspective, a form of member checking (Creswell, 2013). Multiple participants choose to make edits to their initial responses, and many participants added details to their responses once reviewing the transcription. During the member checking process, there was also the opportunity for any participant who had concerns or had additional information to alter the information from their first interview transcription. This brief session was used to confirm all information and also to allow for final thoughts to be shared by the participants.
Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data by following a five-stage process. Stages one through four include analyzing the individual participant’s responses before analyzing overarching themes in stage five which is important in IPA research to allow for in depth analysis before drawing any conclusions (Smith et al., 2009; Shaw, 2010). Stages one through four were repeated for each participant interview. IPA research is inductive in nature and requires the participant to be reflective and actively engaged with the data (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). In the fifth stage, the research identified themes and applied them to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory to determine how the participant’s experiences were either consistent or divergent from the theory in relation to the research topic.

Stage One. The first stage of the data analysis process involves a deep review of the interview transcripts from the first session with participants (Smith et al., 2009). In this step, the researcher focused on bracketing, or limiting, any preconceived ideas or biases. During step one, the researcher listened to the recording of the interviews multiple times and transcribed each interview. Next, the researcher thoroughly reviewed each transcript to attempt to better understand each participant (Smith et al., 2009). This discovery stage allowed for deeper connections with each participant in the follow stages:

Stage Two. Next, the researcher began to note exploratory comments (Smith et al., 2009). The line-by-line analysis included observation of the participant’s transcription. During this stage, it was imperative that the researcher made notes of all elements of the interview including voice, pauses and any body language noted during the interview process. This information was used to discover what matters to the participant and to seek understanding of the meaning behind what
was shared in the interview process. The goal of this stage was to develop a deeper understanding of each participant interview (Smith et al., 2009).

**Stage Three.** The third stage included interpretation of the data and identifying emergent themes. Themes were discovered during this stage by bundling information from each participant interview (Smith et al., 2009). A researcher journal was important in this stage as note taking was important in the reflection on the interview process (Shaw, 2010). This stage also included reading the transcripts multiple times to develop themes that were interwoven in the interview transcripts.

**Stage Four.** In this stage, the research began to make connections within the themes to focus on making meaning of the themes that emerge. Shaw (2010) refers to this stage as finding “Chunks” of relevant data. The researcher began to make decisions in this stage on how to contextualize the data.

**Stage Five.** The final stage included bringing together the analysis from each individual participant’s interviews. At this stage, the researcher found patterns in the themes and shared experiences from the interviews. In this stage, a visual graphing of the themes was utilized to demonstrate the overarching discoveries from the interview process. The researcher utilized the theoretical framework as a guide to discuss the findings from the research.

**Ethical Considerations**

There are multiple ethical considerations that researchers should consider when beginning their research. First, it is imperative that the researchers follow the IRB process and comply with the guidelines designed to protect all human participants in research studies (Murray & Holmes, 2014). This includes taking all appropriate measures to protect data integrity.
and the confidentiality of the participants. In order to protect the data and participants` identities, all audio files and written documents containing data pertaining to the research were stored electronically on the researcher’s computer in password protected files. Passwords and other security features will be maximized. Any physical documents (field notes, consent forms, etc.) related to the research project were stored in a locked cabinet and the key will be kept in the possession of the researcher.

Additionally, participant`s emotional well-being was a top priority of the researcher. Researchers must be aware of the possible triggers of emotional responses that may occur through the interview process (Creswell, 2013). Creating a safe environment is key to encouraging open dialogue. The researcher needs to remain impartial so that the interview process is seen as non-critical and welcoming to the participant (Creswell, 2013). Since the population of this study have entered into developmental education coursework, the researcher paid special attention to limit the risk that this population would feel ashamed or vulnerable discussing their enrollment in these courses. Reflecting on academic difficulties may be beneficial for some participants, but it may be challenging for others. Approaching each interview with sensitivity is an important ethical consideration the researcher made to ensure open dialogue and a safe environment for participants.

**Trustworthiness.** The researcher also took several measures to ensure trustworthiness throughout the data collection and analysis procedures to establish and maintain credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

**Credibility.** In order to gain credibility, multiple sources of data were utilized to develop a comprehensive understanding of each participant’s perspective (Creswell, 2013). Also, the researcher needed to ensure that the study measures the subject matter that it was intended to
measure (Shelton, 2004). Member-checking also occurred when the researcher presented the interview transcript and validated the interpretation with each participant. During this process, participants were asked to confirm that the transcripts match what they actually intended to say (Shelton, 2004). Feedback provided by participants was incorporated in order to create the most credible depiction of the participant’s views.

**Transferability.** The researcher utilized the technique of thick description, a form of representation of analyzing data and making meaning in multiple contexts (Freeman, 2014). Thick description allows for the conclusions to be drawn in this study to be transferable to other contexts. The IPA methodology’s idiographic focus also assists with the transferability to other topics as the duality is captured through shared humanity and similar experiences (Smith, 2004).

**Dependability.** To establish dependability, an internal audit was conducted by the researcher and a transparent audit trail was kept throughout the research process including all interview notes, recordings and researcher journal. All files were backed up and password-protected and locked in safe place which was imperative to ensure availability and security (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to confirm dependability, the research process within the study was reported in detail to the degree that another researcher could repeat the work to find similar results (Shelton, 2004).

**Confirmability.** To maintain confirmability, the researcher ensured that the findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the inclinations of the researcher (Shelton, 2004). To focus on limiting biases and assumptions, a reflexive journal was kept throughout the research process to allow for an outlet for the research. Additionally, extensive excerpts and block quotes was used in the analysis (Shelton, 2004).
Potential Research Bias

Positionality is a concept that acknowledges the impact of race, class, gender, and other socially constructed identifiers in our view of the world (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). As there will be always be some level of bias included in a research study based on the perspective of the researcher, it is important to identify and acknowledge these biases in attempt to limit their impact on the research study (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). My identity as a woman, a first generation college student, and as a Caucasian individual from the United States influences my perspective of this problem of practice. Also, my current and past work and educational experiences influence my biases. Being aware of these biases and presuppositions is important because it influenced the type of research methods that I naturally gravitate towards in my study and influenced how participants in my research responded to me as a researcher (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). By recognizing these biases, I was cognizant to include other viewpoints and lenses of research in my study.

As a first generation college student, I have experienced some of the confusion and frustration that other first generation students may face when beginning college. As many students who enroll in developmental education are first generation college students, this assisted me in relating to the student population that I am researching; however, sharing this experience may also have caused me to be biased as I subconsciously compared their experience to mine when in reality the experiences may be very different. The “structural and deficit thinking” that Jupp and Slattery (2006) discuss also occurred within myself as I struggled to find a way to relate to students enrolled in developmental education coursework while understanding the possible cultural and socioeconomic differences between students that I am trying to assist with my research and myself (p.199).
My middle class socioeconomic background also influenced my biases and assumptions as well as my perspective of how income influences educational preparation. The culture in which I was raised to understand that all should have an equal opportunity to a quality education has led me to have the presupposition that the United States developmental education system is failing many individuals. If I did not experience the struggles that even a middle class family had in finding quality and equitable education, I might have a different bias or mindset in starting my research. In studies that explored how educators make connections with diverse student populations, Caucasian teachers participating in the research discussed how they found commonalities with their students even though they taught in predominately diverse classrooms (Jupp & Slattery, 2006). As a Caucasian researcher interviewing participants from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, learning strategies from these studies helped me build trust with the participants.

As I currently work at the research site, a private non-profit institution, and have worked in a variety of institutions including rural and urban community colleges, four year institutions, and public and non-profit private institutions, I have significant experience working with diverse student populations; however, it is crucial that I did not make assumptions about student populations at these various types of institutions based on my past work experiences, as that could impact my research study. When crafting my research questions, it was important to be open minded and not ask leading questions based on my own experience and observations working with students enrolled in developmental education.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations to this research. There are key limitations to this study. First, like all qualitative studies, the generalizability of the findings may be constrained to
certain populations. Since participants were recruited that fit a specific profile, low income students who have completed developmental education coursework enrolled at a private, non-profit institutions, their experiences should not be understood as representing a broader student population. There are other factors such as age, gender, family background and cultural influences that may play a role in the participant’s college experience that are not explored in this study. Also, the experiences of these participants may not be transferable to students at other types of institutions since the private, non-profit institution that the participants are enrolled in is unique in that the programs are career focused unlike many other types of institutions. Since this research utilized Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, the results are limited to the transition these students face when completing developmental educational coursework.

Finally, the nature of interviewing participants remotely is a limitation to this study, as some students may have found it difficult opening up about their experiences especially academic difficulties over the phone or video conference. To minimize this limitation, the researcher arranged for multiple check points and interviews with the participant to gain trust and allow the participant to open up over time. Due to the idiographic focus of IPA, the research is intended to reflect the shared experience of 4-10 participants who experienced the transition from developmental education coursework to their remaining coursework in their respective programs of study. Due to the busy lifestyles of the non-traditional population, the researcher had challenges recruited more than five participants that could commit to the time needed for the interview process.

Summary

This study explored the experiences of college students from low-income backgrounds that have enrolled in and completed developmental education coursework. IPA methodology
was ideal for this study as it allowed for the participants` voice and stories to be captured. The researcher made meaning of the participant`s experiences by analyzing the data in an inductive manner. Once the data was analyzed, the research then used deductive references to Schlossberg`s Transition Theory. The goal of this research was to share the participants` perspectives in an authentic way that can influence practice in the field of higher education. In chapter four, the findings and analysis will be discussed in detail.

**Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis**

The purpose of this IPA study was to understand the perspectives of students who have successfully transitioned from developmental education to their programs of study at a private, non-profit institution. The central goal of the research is to understand what the experience means to the participants (Forrester, 2010). Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to capture their perspectives. The experiences of students who have successfully completed developmental education courses are important and unique when compared to overall student success studies. Through this study, it has become apparent that these students have overcome personal and financial challenges and utilized a diverse support network to accomplish their goals. The results from this study suggest that these students motivation for a better life for themselves and their families was the driving force of their success coupled by the support systems of their family, community and institutional resources.

While there is existing literature on students enrolled in developmental education coursework, this study is unique in that it focuses This study seeks to make sense of how a group of six Pell-eligible students enrolled at a private, non-profit institution make sense of their success in transition from developmental education courses to their core courses in their program. These students have all successfully completed their developmental education
coursework and are currently enrolled in college level English and Math along with their program specific coursework.

The researcher followed the following steps in the data analysis: deep review of the interview transcripts, exploratory comments, identifying emerging themes, connecting themes to contextualize, and the visual graphing of themes and overarching discovery. The researcher clustered themes in order to reduce them to meaningful chunks (Forrester, 2010). Then, the final superordinate themes were derived. The analysis of the interview data yielded six super-ordinate themes: flexibility and life balance, family support, motivation for a better life, grit, ability to navigate resources, and confidence. These themes have twelve corresponding subthemes.

The subthemes are 1.1 Online Modality 1.2 Time Management 2.1 Family Decision Making 2.2 First Generation Pressure 3.1 Prospect for a Career 3.2 Financial Motivation 4.1 Ability to Overcome Challenges 4.2 Determination to Succeed 5.1 Awareness of Resources 5.2 Ability to ask for help 6.1 Overcoming fear 6.2. Building on small successes. Table 2: Superordinate Themes by Participant represents the themes that emerged and the recurrence of each theme by participant.

The themes and analysis were guided by the research question: How do students, who are currently enrolled in credit-level coursework after successfully completing at least one developmental education course at a private university, explain and make sense of successfully navigating their experience in developmental education?

The researcher utilized a purposive sample of five students who have successfully completed developmental education and are now enrolled in their program of study at a private non-profit institution participated in this study. Block quotes from the participants were utilized to demonstrate trustworthiness and authenticity. Member checking was also conducted as part of
the research to ensure that the participant’s voice was represented correctly in the study.

Participants were sent a copy of the interview transcription and a follow up conversation was
scheduled to confirm any edits or additions to the original interview. Each of the participants
was given a pseudonym to protect their confidentially.

**Table 2. Superordinate Themes by Participant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes Subthemes</th>
<th>Ashley</th>
<th>Evan</th>
<th>Desiree</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Ann</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Flexibility and Life Balance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Online Modality</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Time Management</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Family Support and Responsibility</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Family Dedication</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 First Generation Pressure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Motivation for a Better Life</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Prospect for a Career</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Financial Motivation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Grit</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Ability to Overcome Challenges</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Determination to Succeed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ability to Navigate Resources</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Awareness and Utilization of Resources</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Ability to Ask for Help</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Building Confidence</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Overcoming Fear</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2 Building on Small Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Theme I: Flexibility and Life Balance

The superordinate theme of the importance of flexibility and life balance for student success emerged from the clustering of the subthemes of online modality and time management. In the researcher field notes, the phrases “time management” and “online modality” were written eight times. While flexibility and life balance may be important to most individuals in a variety of settings, college can be especially stressful for students who have outside of classroom responsibilities such as parenting, employment and care giving. Also, like the participants in this study, students from low income backgrounds may have extra stressors as their educational funding availability is based on their academic success.

Online Modality

While this study was not focused on the modality of education, online modality naturally became a central part of the conversation with every participant. There was not a specific question asked about life balance or flexibility, yet it was the most common response from participants when asked what contributed to their success. The participants noted the importance of flexibility in their course schedule and attributed their success to their ability to balance their life obligations and their education.

For most participants, online education was new to them and part of their transition as they enrolled into college. For most participants, it was not an option to enroll in a traditional college experience due to their work and family schedule. One participant discussed working up to 50 hours per week at a fast food restaurant and described how her schedule was unpredictable at times. Therefore, for her, online education was not a convenience, it was a necessity.
One participant expressed how her responsibilities as an employee and mother were a factor for why she choose online education. She chose online education because she is not only working full time but also is the main care giver of her children. Another participant discusses how she needs to work proactively the first three days of the week to get ahead of her assignments as she works a shift schedule. When asked about any outside factors that have impacted her education, Beth answered,

I work a 12-hour shift, so I'm able to adjust my days. They adjusted it for me so I could work a day shift on Sunday and then I can work the following end of the week, so that gives me basically the first three days to get my discussions in and chip away at the major part of my assignments.

While both participants mentioned the asset of flexibility in online education, both also brought up limitations when faculty members were not accommodating to their complex schedule. One participant mentioned that some instructors only referred him to the tutor if he got behind in the coursework, describing how he was then on his own to google search resources. Another participant discussed her frustration when faculty would not let her submit work early when her work schedule interfered with due dates for assignments. When asked about any challenges she has faced, Ashley responded:

There is a reason why I asked to submit it early because if I wait, I have a 48 hour job. It becomes very frustrating when everybody else can let me submit it early and then you're telling me not to, but those are your rules I have to stick to your rules.

Ashley was describing her experience with one specific instructor and her frustration that faculty could choose to not accept work early based on their syllabus and classroom policies. She
did go on to say that most faculty members were accommodating with her schedule, and that she
would have never been able to be successful without being able to complete work anytime she
has free.

**Time Management**

The participants demonstrated their ability to juggling the competing priorities of being a
parent, student and employee. A challenge for one of the participants was when outside factors
impacted a group activity. Beth described that group work was her least favorite activity because
of the limited flexibility and coordination of schedules. From her earlier responses in the
interview process, it seemed that she wanted peer support and interaction as she discussed she
feared not being part of a community in an online university. However, with her busy schedule
due to work and family obligations, it became more of a burden than a support. Beth responded:

I had to recently do a group activity with me and two other ladies and just their outside
factors and my outside factors, then we both fell into those outside factors. That was
almost not turned in. It freaked me out, so yeah. I'm a lone star. I'd rather do my
assignment to the best of my ability and turn it in.

When asked to describe the type of curriculum support that the participants most
preferred, three out of the four participants said that they preferred adaptive learning and online
videos and support as it was self-paced. Some participants had not yet been required to be part of
a group activity, but those that had, rated group work as their least favorite as it required
coordinating schedules and relying on others for their success. When discussing the adaptive
platform and mapping, a few participants noted that they enjoyed that they could work at their
“own pace”.
Evan described the adaptive platform by saying, “I think I like the adaptive learning part, because then I can actually adjust at my own pace. That would be, I guess, my favorite part.” When discussing his least favorite part of his coursework, Evan discussed how difficult it can be to be successful in online courses if a faculty member is not available to assist him. He described this challenge by saying,

“When I'm trying to follow the directions as to what they say, and they don't really match up to what I see, then I have questions. That part is kind of hard, because then you're stuck. Then I tried to get hold of the teacher to see what I'm supposed to do or what I'm doing wrong, and that's sometimes hard. That would probably be my least favorite, because I don't like that part of it.”

While not all participants had adaptive learning as their favorite method of learning, all participants listed it as either their first or second option out of the following choices: online support, group work, in-class activities such as discussion posts, and adaptive assessments. Group work was least favorite for all of the participants which demonstrates the importance that self-pacing and independence means to them.

The participants’ discussion of their process of time management and how they utilize the online modality to fit into their schedules demonstrates their adaptability and need for flexible policies around how they learn. Through the interview process, it was discovered that the majority of participants contribute their success to flexibility in their education and ability to learn at their own pace at their preferred time. The structure within this level of flexibility was revealed to be equally important to the participants. Predictable due dates were appreciated and needed by the participants due to other factors in their life that were often unpredictable.
including work schedules and family responsibilities. The participants were seeking adaptability and flexibility in their education but discussed how they knew what to expect to fit in the time needed to be successful in their busy lives.

**Conclusion**

While flexibility and time management were discussed the most often as the most important factor for the majority of the participants’ success, family support and a feeling of responsibility was also important to the students. In many ways, these two themes go together as their family is also involved in their decision to continue their education and further their career. Since all of participants are also first generation college students, their families are also going through the transition of learning about college for the first time and balancing family time and navigating life balance (Barry, Hudley, Kelly & Cho, 2009).

**Theme II: Family Support and Responsibility**

The superordinate theme of family support was formed from the subthemes of family dedication and the pressure of being a first-generation college student. Often, students may be influenced by individuals beyond immediate family members or dependents. The term family in this research expands beyond a nuclear family of only dependents and spouses. Some participants discussed their grandparents, cousins and aunts and uncles when discussing their support system. They also shared that their children, even very young children, were supporting them in this journey and looking up to them. This feeling of support and responsibility to the family to be successful can be intensified if a student is a first generation college student, or a student whose parents did not graduate from college. There can often be pressure on these
individuals as they will be paving the way for others in the family to have insight on the higher education process.

**Family Support**

All participants discussed their family in some way throughout the interview process. Three participants discussed their spouse in their interview responses. Two participants discussed their children. Family time was important to all the participants, and they all discussed the balancing of family, school, and work responsibilities. They discussed the difficulty of life balance when working full time, spending time with family and being a student. While having a family that supported them was an asset that will be discussed as the next theme, the time management of balancing family and school could be viewed as a liability.

The importance of family support was discussed as their main motivator throughout the interview process. Two participants discussed their family commitment to their education as the main factor for their success. They discussed the role their spouse and children played in encouraging them to stay committed until graduation. Desiree discussed her spouse tutoring her by responding:

My husband's like an editor to me. If I have a question about an English term, he's there for me. His step dad is a math teacher, so I had tutors that actually able to be interactive with me.

Another participant discussed his role as a student and father. His daughters are also enrolled in college, and he shared the importance of his success on his daughter’s success. Evan discussed the financial benefit of all of them enrolled in college together.
Well, two of my daughters are in college. So, me going to college, too, I think it helps drive me, too, because they're basing their financial aid off of my income. As long as I'm going to school, they get more help. We all do. So, I use that as a driving force. I have to keep going and I have to be successful to help them be successful, so I think it works both ways.

Family support of the participants was a main motivator for their success, and many of the participants contributed their success to the assistance and understanding of their family members. That being said, the pressure to succeed academically while maintaining the role as a parent, care giver and financial contributor seemed to weigh heavily on some of the participants. The researcher notes that participants demonstrated signs of stress when discussing the challenges with life balance and sacrifice of family time to dedicate to their studies. These signs included sighs, long pauses and change in voice tone signifying an emotional response.

**Pressure of Being First Generation College Student**

The pressure of being a first generation college student and being a role model to his daughters seemed to motivate Evan to succeed as he knew that not only did their financial aid depend on their concurrent enrollment, but he also implied in his response that they support each other through the process. By knowing his daughters are looking up to him and that they also are going through the college process together, Evan has a shared experience with his family that other participants in the study are not experiencing. Participants like Ashley are also the first in their family to attend college but do not seem to have that same support system. Ashley described the pressure to succeed as she is giving up opportunities for extra hours at work to attend classes. She said that she does not always have anyone who has gone through similar
challenges she has gone through in college to go to for advice, so she looks for her faculty and advisor to give her advice.

Similarly, Beth also discussed that she was the first person in her family attending college and that her family was counting on her success. There was a sense of responsibility that she discussed as she and her husband were counting on her ability to find employment after graduation. He was part of her decision-making about where she completed her externship.

They found this place for me. It's a nice place, I have no problem with it. The only problem I have is that they want me to travel up to another facility they have. My husband said that's way too far for you to travel.

Family support extends beyond immediate family. One of the participants brought up their work family in the interview. She contributed her success in her developmental math course to the Jesuits that tutored her in the nursing home in which she has worked throughout her time as a student. While this participant did not utilize many college resources, she described how her work family supported her and motivated her to finish her degree.

I have worked at a nursing home. And, in the nursing home I work with old pastors and priests, called Jesuits. And, they help me all big time with my math homework. They help me understand it. They are tutoring me.

While no participant said the phrase “first generation college student”, many discussed the pressure of being the first in their family to navigate college or discussed how they had different responsibilities than family and friends in the interview process without being prompted to discuss this topic. Likewise, no one explicitly stated that they felt like they were outsiders or were feeling like an “imposter” in college. However, all of the participants did discuss the initial
feeling of being overwhelmed and nervous until they realized that they did belong in college and realized that the other students were not that different than them.

Through the conversation about the participants’ family, the researcher learned about the commitment the participants have to their children and larger family structure. The other discovery is that many of the participants felt that their accomplishment of beginning college and earning a credential was also for their family. The responsibility and pride they felt for being first-generation college students was discovered through their discussion about what contributed to their success. While there was no specific question about family support, all participants discussed their children and spouses.

Conclusion

The opportunity available to first-generation college students not only to change their own career trajectory but also to increase the likelihood that their family members may seek out higher education options can be both an empowering and daunting feat. The family support of the participants made all the difference in their decision to stay enrolled in college despite personal challenges that came in some of their lives, including illness and new job responsibilities. The motivation for a better life for themselves and their families helped the participants overcome this fear as they did not see failure as an option.

Theme III: Motivation for a Better Life

The superordinate theme of the students’ motivation for a better life emerged from the clustering of the subthemes of prospect for a career and financial motivation. While the majority of individuals’ main motivation for attending college would likely be to improve their life, this motivation could be seen as stronger from those from low income backgrounds as the stakes to
succeed are even higher. Students attending a private, non-profit institution with a career focus are typically starting their program with a career outcome in mind. While there are general education requirements such as math and writing courses required for most programs, students typically begin career specific courses in their program in the first program so having a clear vision of which career they are pursuing after graduation is more critical than for students attending a non-career-focused university.

**Prospect for a Career**

Participations discussed their future career goals and the motivation to be successful so that they can advance in their careers. As all of the participants are Pell recipients, most of the participants did mention a better paying career as motivation for success.

By my degree being in healthcare management, I definitely want to start in with Bachelor's degree, working in a hospital, being a supervisor. Either being in control of payroll, human resources, supervising and actually getting my hands dirty. That degree covers that whole shebang. Everything I'm taking covers whether I can do billing and coding, computer software, whatever the case may be. Whatever I decide to pick.

Given the combination that participants in this study are all enrolled in a career program ranging from diploma to bachelor programs, and receive the Pell grant based on a low Expected Family Contribution (EFC), their earning potential substantially improves when they graduate from their degree programs in healthcare, business and information technology. Therefore, their motivation is timely completion. This would help explain how they are driven to work full time while completing a rigorous curriculum. Four out of the five participants attend full time. Since students are required to be enrolled in at least 6 credit hours per term to receive full financial aid,
they would need to spend at least 20 hours per week on coursework on top of their 40 hour work schedule.

Not only does a higher earning potential motivate the participants, but also working in a career field of interest that students consider a career and not a job was important to the participants. As many of the participants work in shift work where their schedules change regularly, their schedule can be unpredictable which can make it difficult for them and their families. Three of the participants discussed their schedules changing based on shift schedules, and multiple participants discussed that they are often asked to work more than 40 hours per week depending on demand on their job. This mandatory overtime often was not planned and therefore required students to make arrangements with their faculty members and family to figure out a way to get everything completed, which was needed each week to “survive”.

Three of the participants, Ashley, Even and Desiree, are scheduled to graduate in the next six months. Their motivation for a better life also seems to give them a sense of urgency to not only graduate in their field, but to exceed in their coursework to make them more marketable in their career search. Many of the participants discussed that they utilize career resources, far more than they mentioned other resources such as tutoring or the library. The level of urgency for them to successfully enter their career field is understandably higher than traditional college students who may not have the pressure of providing for their families on their mind. The participants seemed less interested in student life activities and more interested in paid internships and career outcomes. Therefore, their motivation to succeed seems to be more driven by financial necessity than self-satisfaction.
Financial Motivation

The theme of financial motivation was strong in these participants’ responses to the question about outside life factors that have impacted their experiences. Like many individuals from low income backgrounds, they struggled with the decisions of short-term gains of taking an extra earning opportunity versus taking an extra course and graduating early. As they are enrolled at a private, non-profit institution, tuition is higher than other types of institutions such as community colleges or state colleges. Many of the participants discussed the reason why they chose the institution despite the extra financial cost. For most of them, the time to degree was the most important factor. For Ashley, it was the ability to continue working her 48+ hour job since she had the flexibility of time to work on her coursework. While the other participants do not work as many hours as Ashley, all of them work full time and many of them have varying schedules that require the ability to change academic schedules as needed. Also, all of the participants’ tuition and fees are covered by state and federal grants, loans and scholarships.

The participants’ motivation to succeed drove them to maintain their work and study schedule. Based on the student’s course loads and their work schedules, the researcher calculated that the participants spent 55-60 hours per week on average on work and academic activities. This type of intensity would not be sustainable long-term. Since there are no breaks in the academic calendar at the private, non-profit institution they all attend, a student can earn a Bachelor’s degree in approximately three years, an Associate’s degree in under two years and Diploma in under a year. Providing for not only themselves, but also their children seems to be the main motivation for the majority of the participants. Ann explains why she enrolled in college again after taking a break,
Well, I graduated high school in 2007. And I went to the University of West Georgia for about a year. Then, I stopped. Then, because I had a lot of deaths in my family and it was just too much. Then, I had my baby and I was like, you know what, I have to do better for us. So, 2017.

The main discovery from this theme is the participants` urgency for a successful career based on their financial insecurity. The participants` anxiety came through when discussing their feelings when entering college. Even though the participants entered college being nervous and anxious, their motivation to succeed based on their current work, financial situation and personal and family needs pushed them past that anxiety to take the first step to transition into college. As all participants are receiving full financial aid, their success in college not only impacts their academic record, but also their finances. The majority of participants remained a full time student when many other students would have adjusted their schedule to a part-time status load likely because of the financial benefits of being a full-time student. Many of the participants discussed that they had future educational aspirations beyond graduation including earning the next level of their degree and eventually becoming a manager or owning their own business. This shows not only their motivation to succeed in their current program, but also their ability to look past their immediate situation and strive for something more.

**Conclusion**

Their motivation to succeed contributes to their overall grit and ability to overcome roadblocks that may have made other individuals give up on their goals. The students` resiliency is a combination of their motivation, grit and ability to ask for help when needed. In the next theme session, participants shared their outside challenges that could have impacted their academic success and how they overcame those challenges with their determination to persevere.
Theme IV: Grit

The superordinate theme of the grit emerged from the clustering of the subthemes of the participants’ ability to overcome challenges and their determination to succeed. Grit can be defined in many ways. For this research, grit is defined by conquering challenges and demonstrating a will to win. While academic ability is a key indicator of future success, grit can make all the difference in a student succeeding or not. The Department of Education recognized the importance of fostering perseverance and grit in the Office of Technology (2013) proposal. This document discussed the importance of institutions utilizing strategies to increase a student’s chance of success through motivation and a drive to succeed. One strategy in the proposal urged institutions to provide a rigorous and supportive environment for students where they can accomplish goals worthy of the student’s time and effort (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Technology, 2013).

Ability to Overcome Challenges

All of the participants shared responses that highlighted their determination to persevere despite challenges of illness, long work hours and low socioeconomic status. Desiree discusses her drive to succeed and difficulty to balance her work life and academics. She currently has earned a 4.0 GPA while rotating night and morning shifts at work. When asked about outside factors that impact her success, she discussed the importance of not making excuses for herself. She responded,

I try not to let outside factors impact the success of my 4.0 GPA in which I hold, but it's hard with my job because we rotate every 3 months, but I've been rotated from days to nights sort of like every 2 weeks. That kind of gets hard because I become tired and when I become tired I'm not as effective.
This type of response was not unique to one participant. The group shared a common intrinsic motivation to achieve. Another participant, Evan, shared the difficulties he had when his daughter became seriously ill. Instead of walking away from his education, he asked for help and persevered. He described this experience by saying,

One of my daughters had a little bit of a scare. She was having some personal issues, where they thought she might have a tumor in her bladder or just kidney stones. I was kind of more focused on that than I was school, but my teacher really worked with me. At that time I think I had programming logic. I contacted her and told her what was going on, and she said, "Well, I can adjust with you on the assignments, but I can't help you on the discussions." So, she told me to just try to get my discussions in for the week and then she'd work with me on the assignments. She did, and I was able to get through with an A on that one.

Evan’s ability to ask for help and navigate the academic policies to be successful show his determination to succeed despite a family medical scare. He shared that his family is always his top priority, yet his education helps his family financially. As a single parent, he has the competing priorities of his academic and parental responsibilities.

**Determination to Succeed**

Other participants also shared their plan to success centered on maximizing any free time to focus on academic activities. When the researcher asked the participants about their strategies for success, Beth responded:
Then on my days off, I really do desire to have a day off, but I know I have to get there and spend my time at school. I'll take that day off to ensure that everything gets done for the week.

Another participant described the placement test experience as an opportunity to start again and build knowledge back up after being out of education for quite some time. This positive work ethic and determination to learn was shown is Evan’s response:

I kind of looked at it as an open experience, because I haven't been to school for so long. So, I thought it would be a good opportunity to see where I was at so I can start over with a good foundation again and just build my way back up since it's been so long since I've been to school.

All of the five participants responded that they felt they were placed correctly into their Math and English courses, and they all were positive about the need to take the additional course or courses to build their skill sets for success in their program. Not one participant seemed to consider their placement was an indicator that they would not be successful. They came into college with the growth mindset that if they put in the effort that they would be successful.

When asked the question, “Did you feel like it accurately placed you into the right classes?” Anna responded,

It helped me refresh on everything and it boosted my confidence. So, when college algebra came, which I was trying to avoid until last minute at my pervious school, I was actually ready to do it. I felt like I could do it. It's all because I had that fundamentals class first. But I definitely think it placed me well.

Beth responded to the same question, saying,
Yes, I do. One of my English courses, I could tell, was the basic learning of concepts of writing, which was very fun. I really love that class. We got to be very creative. She talked us through step-by-step process. Each week was a different step and with that English testing actually placed me in a pretty good English course and it helped me with a better understanding of my writing.

While there can often be a stigma around developmental education and likelihood for students to successfully complete in a timely manner, all of these participants completed their course with a passing grade in the first attempt and successfully passed the next level of English and Math on their first attempt. While this is a much different story for many students throughout the nation, these students grit and growth mindset seemed to make all the difference in how they approached their developmental education courses and education in general. Also, their determination to succeed pushed them to ask for help as needed and motivated them to learn the navigation of college resources. This is an important skill for any student to learn particularly first generation college students as many are not coming to college knowing higher education terminology and success tips that other students may learn from family members.

Conclusion

Through learning about the participant’s grit, the researcher discovered their will to win despite some serious challenges including working over 40 hours a week, being the primary caregiver of children and parents and working unpredictable shifts at work. The participants did not make excuses for themselves, and instead shared openly shared what they think they should be doing better to be successful. The majority of the participants were not boastful about their success, instead they were humble and shared that they did not feel like they were doing
anything extraordinary, simply doing their work and putting in the effort needed to learn. This simplicity in their approach is admirable and shows that effort and a good work ethic can go a long way in supporting success. They also contributed their success to their ability to ask for help as needed and to utilize resources inside and outside of the institution.

**Theme V: Ability to Navigate Resources**

The superordinate theme of the students’ motivation for a better life emerged from the clustering of the subthemes an awareness and utilization of the resources and ability to ask for help. While academic skills and grit are both indicators of success, the ability to navigate the college process and utilize resources can make the difference between whether a student is retained or not at an institution. A college’s resources are only beneficial to students if they not only know about them, but also utilize them. All resources at the institution are free to use, and students may utilize them an unlimited number of times while they are students at the institution. Below is a chart of the resources either utilized or not utilized by each of the participants.

**Awareness and Utilization of Resources**

**Table 3. Resources Utilized by Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Resources Utilized</th>
<th>Resources Not Utilized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Tutoring, Student Services Advising, Faculty Office Hours, Library, Career Services</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
<td>Tutoring, Faculty Office Hours, Student Services Advising, Library, Career Services</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desiree</td>
<td>Student Services Advising</td>
<td>Library, Faculty Office Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Student Services Advising, Career Services, Faculty Office Hours</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Career Services, Student Services Advising</td>
<td>Tutoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the students did not utilize all available resources at the institution. However, all students frequently used at least two resources and were able to discuss the majority of available resources. The majority of the participants, Evan, Ashley and Beth, also were able to discuss topics such as faculty office hours and messaging options through the courses. A few of the participants shared that they were confident in asking for help when they needed it and were not afraid to say when they do not know something. Two of the participants described negative experiences with faculty members, yet they were persistent in continuing to seek out assistance. Desiree discussed her negative experience and steps she took to get the resources she needed:

I had a problem with one class, where the teacher was absent the first week of school and she told me just to do my week of school. In the second week, at the end of the week, we finally got a teacher for this class, which was Economics. My specialist is there. She talked to higher ups and see why this class wasn't supporting. She said I wasn't the only student. It made me not feel so alone and neglected because the teacher that was originally assigned for this was not there.

While not all participants utilized advising and tutoring, all participants` responses to the interview questions regarding resources demonstrated that they at least knew what the resources were and how they would utilize them if needed. A few participants shared that they were confused by the titles of Academic Advisor, Student Services Specialist, Faculty and Academic Coaches. While they did not always know the college terminology to describe the resources, they all did know about the library, tutoring and advising available. The majority of the participants discussed utilizing tutoring at least in one subject area.
Ability to Ask for Help

Many of the participants were able to articulate how they asked for help from instructors and their advisors when needing assistance either with their academic work or navigating a college policy and process. Ashley discussed the support she received from a faculty member who taught her how to use APA formatting. Formatting a research paper came up multiple times in the interviews as a challenge for the participants as many of them had never written a research paper before beginning their program. Ashley described how important it was for her to learn how to use the resources like the library:

She helped with providing a lot of sources with our library, especially with APA formatting. I was still struggling a little bit. My computer class was not too far into my other classes, but when I actually got that and she's like, "This is how you do it and this is how it should be done.", and she gave a full example of how to do in-text citation and it was kind of like, I've been doing it wrong. I was kind of like, "Oh!"

Career and Student Services were the most utilized resources from the group. All students knew that tutoring was available to them except for Anna. When asked a follow up question about tutoring that is officially called academic coaching at the college, Anna responded that she was never asked to attend tutoring because she was doing well. She saw it as a negative intervention instead of a proactive intervention. She said she thought this because coaching is used in her work setting when someone made a mistake. Two of the participants discussed how they used tutoring to improve their knowledge in their developmental courses.

Evan discussed how he quickly learned how to adjust to the college process by using resources such as orientation and his Student Services Advisor. He responded,
I guess the fear of the unknown might have slowed me down; but, once I got used to how things were done with Blackboard, and how to interact in discussions, and how to do APA and do all that, then it was a pretty easy transition.

All of the participants discussed the anxiety or overwhelming feeling they first had when entering the university, but there was also excitement. By learning the resources and support available to them and then experiencing their first success in college when passing their developmental course(s), they built themselves up and felt prepared for their next level of courses. Ann described it best when she described the resources and support “in her corner”. She described her support network by:

It's like it's so many positive resources around you, you have no choice but to be a success. If you apply yourself correctly, I mean, of course you can get in there and not do what you're supposed to do and then, get a bad outcome. But, if you apply yourself and use what resources are available, I don't see how you can not be a success. So, I'm just really thankful for that because it's really hard balancing everything but, they make you feel like, "We're right here. Just call us if you need us."

The support the participants described is important because they have entered into a new experience and their awareness of resources and how to utilize them demonstrates their ability to succeed not only in their courses, but also in navigating the overall college process. Since the majority of participants had at least a five year break from education before entering into this college experience, their utilization of resources is even more important as they may not know the college terminology and multiple college policies and procedures that students need to understand.
Conclusion

The researcher discovered the significance that resources had on the participants in not only their coursework but also in their connection to the university. They talked about the relationships built with individuals such as their Student Services Specialist, Career Specialist and faculty members. The participants seemed to trust these individuals with advice about their academic and career choices. The support and guidance of these individuals along with the success in their developmental courses seemed to build their confidence and make them feel that they did belong at the university and in their program of study.

Theme VI: Building Confidence

The superordinate theme of building confidence emerged from the clustering of the subthemes overcoming fear and building on small success. The collegiate experience includes learning not only new academic material, but also learning life lessons and building confidence. For non-traditional students, building confidence can be much different than traditional students. For these participants, entering into college was entering into an unknown environment where they might feel like an outsider. Below is a visual table highlighting how the participants described their entry into developmental education and college and then their transition after the successfully completed their first developmental education course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Word or Phrase Describing the Transition into College and Developmental Coursework</th>
<th>Word of Phrase Describing the Transition after Developmental Coursework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Challenging with life priorities</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>Excited, Relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desiree</td>
<td>Nervous, Scared</td>
<td>Confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beth | Nervous | Relieved
---|---|---
Ann | Anxious | Confident, Empowered

**Overcoming Fear**

Each participant used negative words to describe their initial transition into college and developmental education courses. When asked to elaborate why they felt this way, multiple participants discussed the “fear of the unknown” and feeling like this would be a challenge for them as they knew it would be hard work to be a successful college student. Also, many of the participants had been out of school for many years before making the decision to continue their education. Also, the modality of online education caused some students to have doubt on their ability to be successful without knowing how they would interact with other students and faculty.

The placement test itself caused some anxiety for a few of the participants. One of students shared her fear of the test and that she felt like she may not be successful because of the difficulty of the test. Ashley described her experience by saying:

> With that test, I was very nervous because I never took a SAT. I never took the ACT, any kind of testing like that before. I have took placement tests throughout the schools that I went to. You're taking that test, I just remember I was like, "Oh, God. I'm gonna fail. My IQ is done. They're gonna tell me I didn't get accepted," because some of the synonyms on there was like ... Everything was really hard. I'm not even gonna lie. Some of them just made me feel like, "Am I not ready for this school? This school seems really, really smart."
Ashley also discussed her transition from completing her developmental math courses to her other coursework. When discussing the significances of the “ah-ha” moments when she felt that she understood math for the first time, she said,

There's a couple math teachers that really took their time to like explain everything and make you understand it so that really helped me transition to the math. They were meaningful cause it made me understand ... made me think I can do this now.

**Building on Small Successes**

Another participant, Ann, discussed how she raised her own standards after earning an A in her developmental math course. After the success in her first course, she set a goal to continue to earn high grades in the remainder of her courses. She described this by saying,

So, after the fundaments of math class, and I ended up getting like a 99 out of that class. I was like, "Okay, so I can do this." Then, college algebra came and I just set my goal high and, where I tried my best to avoid it at my last school, I was trying to take every class I could until I couldn't avoid it anymore. To come here to college and it's like, "Okay, it's next. You got to do it." It was nerve wrecking but I was happy that I was able to complete it. I didn't come out with an A. I got a B but, I'm still happy.

The transformation from fear and anxiety to confidence was a common theme of all participants. Many feared that they would not be successful in their first courses because of the fear of the unknown as well as their past confidence level in their academics. For many of the participants, their confidence was built by meaningful interactions with faculty members.
One participant discussed her confidence rising when she was able to build her skills in math by describing the ah-ha moments that made her feel like she was ready for the upcoming courses that she once thought may be too difficult for her.

There's a couple math teachers that really took their time to like explain everything and make you understand it. They (ah-ha moments) were meaningful because it made me understand ... made me think I can do this now. I can continue on and finish up my schooling.

While the confidence of the participants all grew, there are certain courses and experiences that can still make the student uncertain and nervous. One participant, Ann, discusses her upcoming Anatomy course.

At the end of the day, my main thing is I just want to do well. I have a personal goal for myself to either be on the Dean's list or the president's list every term, every semester. That's just kind of something I wanted to do for myself to prove that I can do this. So, with the new classes coming, I'm hoping that I can still obtain that balance. I mean, I know I'll find what works best for me there too but, I'm a little nervous.

In the member checking part of the research process, two of the participants shared that they felt they were more confident in their academic abilities than what they read in the transcribed interviews. Even asked to add in the story that he did believe in himself from the beginning despite the challenges of going into an unknown situation. Beth said that she was really stressed during the interview during the timing of midterm exams. She asked for me to add that overall that she is very happy with her performance and relationships she built with faculty and others in college. It seems like both participants saw negativity in the transcription while the
researcher noted their honest responses. Once they had time to analyze their initial response, they both asked to make their feedback more positive.

Conclusion

Based on evidence from the transcripts, the conclusion the research drew was that the participants’ confidence grow as they talked through their experience and success in college. For many of the participants, this may have been the first time they were having this type of conversation about their journey. When the interview process began, many of the participants felt uneasy about what they would be able to contribute to the study. Once the participants started talking about their educational journey, they seemed to understand the value of their story. The researcher discovered the significance successfully completing their developmental courses had on the overall confidence of the participants.

Conclusion

Through utilizing IPA, the researcher’s reflective interpretation of the interviews is as follows: Students who successfully transition from developmental education courses at a private, non-profit institution overcame challenges through support, determination and motivation. Exploring the contributing factors that assist students who persist through developmental education was the purpose of this study. The research question that guided this study was: How do low-income students, who are currently enrolled in credit-level coursework after successfully completing at least one developmental education course in a private university, explain and make sense of successfully navigating their experience in developmental education? The findings showed that participants contribute many factors to their success including flexibility, their family support and utilizing resources. However, the main reason they were successful is because of their hard work and dedication. They are motivated to succeed out of necessity to
provide for themselves and their family. The students` support system included their family, faculty and staff members, and they were successfully able to navigate resources and all were willing to reach out for help when needed.

While the participants are different ages from various parts of the United States, they shared common traits and experiences. All participants are first-generation college students even though this was not a requirement for this study, and all are from low income backgrounds. Participants noted the importance of flexibility due to their commitments as parents and employees. They chose the private non-profit institution they are attending based on the online modality option as well as the reduced time to degree. The students all demonstrated grit and a high motivation to succeed as they persevered on in the semester even when faced with difficult situations such as a seriously ill child or changes in shift at work.

The participants started their college experience feeling overwhelmed and anxious. Through their first college success of passing their developmental courses, many participants set their expectations higher moving forward in their college journey. Participants applied what they learned in their first semester to make sense of their experience and to feel that they “belong” in the university setting. This finding also showed that participants could be discouraged from using resources from one negative experience and could avoid certain resources based on their misconceptions of the resource. However, the participants grit and motivation kept them persevering even with challenges they faced at the college and outside life factors.

In Chapter Five, the researcher will present a discussion of the analysis and implications of the findings. This chapter will discuss the significance of the findings and the themes that emerged through the interviews with the participants. This will be examined utilizing the
Schlossberg’s theoretical framework. The relevant literature of the profession will be integrated with the themes from the participant interviews and theoretical framework.

**Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this research was to investigate students’ sense of their success while completing developmental education and transitioning into the subsequent coursework at a private non-profit institution. The information generated from this study can inform higher education practitioners who support students who experience a similar transition into and out of developmental education. Therefore, this chapter will include a review of the findings within the context of Schlossberg’s transition theory (1984) and the extant literature.

Schlossberg’s transition theory (1984) provided a framework that highlights the key stages for these students’ transition into college, into developmental education, out of developmental education and into their remaining coursework in their programs of study. A qualitative study, specifically IPA, was most appropriate for this topic as the goal was to understand different aspects of a student’s experience and to be part of the meaning-making process (Creswell, 2012). This approach allowed the research to capture how the participants interviewed in the study made sense of their success and what factors they perceived supported them in successfully transitioning through developmental education.

The research yielded six findings. The first of the six superordinate themes discovered in the research process was flexibility and life balance. This finding uncovered that participants have parental responsibilities and full time work schedules. They value flexibility and the ability to maintain the best life balance they can while maintaining competing priorities. The second theme was family support and responsibility. The third theme was motivation for a better life.
The participants are driven not only by a career change, but also by financial motivation. The fourth theme was grit. The participants had a unique ability to overcome challenges despite being first-generation college students. The fifth theme was the ability to navigate resources. Not only did the participants know about the university resources, many utilized all available options during their time as a student at the university. The sixth theme was building confidence through their success. The participants went through a significant transition into and out of developmental education, and their confidence was built through this progression.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings in context with the relevant literature and Schlossberg’s transition theory (1984). To guide the recommendations, Schlossberg’s transition theory will be highlighted in detail in relation to the research study. Then, recommendations and implications of each theme utilizing the theoretical framework and research will be discussed. Lastly, the implications for the higher education community including the researcher, and university faculty and staff will be provided along with limitations and recommendations for future research.

**Schlossberg’s Framework in Relation with Themes**

Schlossberg’s research states that there are four coping mechanisms that individuals utilize when going through a transition. The four categories are support, strategies, self and situation. The themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants were consistent with Schlossberg’s research and fit into the four categories. Below is Table 5: Schlossberg’s 4 S Model that highlights how the themes of flexibility and life balance, family support, motivation for a better life, grit, ability to navigate resources and building confidence fit into Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.
Table 5. Schlossberg's 4 S Model in Relationship with Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility and Life Balance</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for a Better Life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Navigate Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flexibility and Life Balance

The first finding from the study was that all participants needed and valued flexibility in their schedule. They are able to cope with the transition into developmental education and college based on their choice to select an institution with online modality. There is structure within this flexibility as the participants describe by discussing what their daily plan is to complete assignments and assessments due on certain days in the week on a consistent basis. Like most non-traditional students, the participants in the study worked full time positions, often working more than 40 hours per week. Consistent with the literature, the participants described the difficulty they faced balancing work, coursework and family life (Forbus, Newbold & Mehta, 2011).

Multiple participants shared that they were able to cope with the transition of starting courses because of the flexibility that the online modality provided them and that the majority of faculty members were willing to accommodate their busy lifestyles. When asked about the preference in learning, three of the participants rated adaptive learning in their top two
preferences based on the ability to learn at their own pace. This is consistent with the recommendations in the literature that state that students are most successful when the educational experience is personalized to their knowledge and preferences (Swan, 2001; Bolliger, 2004). The literature supports the results from this study as students are most successful in developmental education coursework when there are changes to curriculum based on the unique student populations and culture at the institution (Asera, 2011; Sheldon & Durdella, 2010).

All college students can experience “overload” which is why some colleges have introduced initiatives that encourage students to be deliberate about the time they spend inside and outside of the classroom to get the most out of their college experience (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2005). For the participants, those outside of the classroom experiences included meeting with faculty during their office hours, tutoring with an academic coach or discussing resources with their career development specialist or student services specialist.

For these non-traditional students who shared their perspective through this research study, flexibility in their education was essential to their success. Many of them shared that they would not have returned to college if they did not have the option to learn when it was convenient for them. Since their family was a top priority in their life, they needed an option to learn new skills to advance their career while not compromising the time available for their family and work obligations.

**Family Support and Responsibility**

The participants shared the importance of family in the interview process, and the level of responsibility and support they felt from their spouses, children and immediate family. The
examples of family support that the participants described ranged from being tutored by family members to being enrolled in college at the same time as their children. A few of the participants also shared the responsibility and pride they felt in their education. It was clear the future accomplishment of graduation that they were working towards was not only for themselves, but also for their families.

Consistent with the literature on this important topic, the first-generation college student participants did experience pressure to succeed not only for themselves, but also for their family (Berry et.al, 2009). Using Schlossberg’s theory as a model, this responsibility can be viewed as both an asset and liability as it motivated them to succeed while also creating stress in their lives. They utilized this added pressure as an advantage and viewed it mostly as a privilege to be the first in the family to complete a degree.

While the literature discusses the importance of peer to peer support (Pinkerton, 2010; Di Tommaso, 2012), these students did not prefer group activities and the majority rated any group project or activity as their least favorite learning activity. Instead, they preferred to work on their own or to collaborate with their faculty individually. For these students, the time available to spend with family was more important to them than building a social network in college.

**Motivation for a Better Life**

The participants’ motivation for a better life included new career opportunities and a prospect for more financial stability. There is often a delay in graduation and realization of this goal for students who place into developmental education. Students will often run out of funding to pay for all of the courses they need for their degree completion; therefore, successful
completion of these courses on the first attempt is critical to avoid those consequences (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Koch, Slate, & Moore, 2012; Asera, 2011).

The participants in the study did not seem to be discouraged by their placement into these courses, and instead saw it as an opportunity to understand the resources they needed to be successful in future coursework. This is inconsistent with the literature that states that many colleges are being forced to reassess their policies based on the data that students are often misplaced and unsuccessful after completing developmental education coursework (Wilson, 2012). Every participant shared that they felt they were placed correctly in the courses and did not seem to see their placement as negative. Instead, they say it was an asset to be able to learn the skills needed for them to be successful in their program of study. It should be noted that the students were able to start in their first program specific courses concurrently with their developmental education courses.

The students’ motivation to not only complete their degree, but also complete it in a short period time is important to note as all participants had completed 95% of attempted credits. This is inconsistent with the literature that describes the challenges students typically face with timely completion of their coursework (Koch, Slate & Moore, 2012, Asera, 2011). The motivation of participants can impact the modality and learning methods they gravitate towards in their college search (Clayton, Blumberg & Auld, 2010). These students chose an online modality as they were motivated to finish their degree in a short period of time with the ability to learn at an accelerated pace. This difference could be attributed to the age and life responsibilities of the participants as all of them were parents working full time.

The literature has mainly focused on the traditional aged population and their timely completion of their degree, which is much different than the population that participated in this
study (Arendale, 2011). These students were all set to graduate on time within 150% timeframe or 3 years for an Associate’s degree and 6 years for a Bachelor’s degree. This is significant because a common theme that emerged in the literature is that there are consequences for students to need to complete developmental education in regards to the length of time needed to complete their degree and the implications of using their financial aid money to pay for courses that are not counting towards their degree completion (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Koch, Slate, & Moore, 2012; Asera, 2011).

Many students may give up on their education when work shifts change or children become ill mid semester; however, these students persevered. Their motivation, determination to succeed and grit helped them to both complete developmental education coursework and to go on to be successful in their non-remedial coursework. While each student’s situation is unique, their challenges are consistent with other non-traditional students’ life barriers— their urgency to finish their degree and grit made the difference that pushed them to continue on with their education while other students may have needed to take a break (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

Grit

Grit can be difficult to measure. Grit is a psychological strength that describes an individual’s level of perseverance and their passion for long-term goals (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The will to win despite challenges was a theme that resonated in the interview process. Consistent with the literature, one would expect the participants’ success, based on their demonstrated grit and determination to succeed (Duckworth & Gross, 2014).

Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) state that grit entails working toward challenges, demonstrating effort and focus despite failure and experiencing adversity. While all the participants may have seen their placement into developmental education as a
failure, they did not. Instead they had a growth mindset and had a positive determination. While they were nervous in the beginning of the transition into college, they used that anxious feeling to their advantage by being proactive in setting up time with the advisor, academic coach and faculty.

All of the participants had positive results not only in their developmental education courses but also outside of their college experience. Many described the courses’ value in their work environment. Psychological traits such as grit have been shown to have a positive impact on retention in college and in work environments. (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Consistent with the literature on the topic of grit, the participants in the study worked past life challenges and maintained their focus in determining their goal of graduation despite adversity or slight setbacks in their journey (Duckworth et al, 2007). Their challenges included their demanding and changing work schedules, responsibility of being the primary caregiver for their children and maintaining quality of life with a low income that qualified them for full financial aid eligibility. Their success is significant as the majority of students enrolled into developmental education are not completing these courses to enroll in credit-level coursework (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). The participants’ grit paired with their ability to navigate the college process and utilize resources contributed to their collective success.

**Ability to Navigate Resources**

The participants utilized the majority of resources available to them at the university throughout their time in developmental education. Once they transitioned to other coursework, they continued to use resources such as academic coaching, faculty office hours, and career development. Consistent with the literature, the participants had a positive connection with the staff and faculty that assisted them in advising sessions, tutoring and office hours (Walker,
2008). Multiple studies highlighted that support options like tutoring, mentoring, and financial aid impacted student success more than enrolling in developmental education and did not find a significant difference in success of students who enrolled in developmental education and those who were not enrolled in developmental education (Bremer et al, 2013, Pinkerton, 2010, Asera, 2011; Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012).

Active participation by students and an interactive learning environment were preferred by the participants. This is to be expected based on the best practices in the literature. The literature suggests that when faculty members use course material that relates to students' lives and career interests, students are able to grasp the main concepts needed to move to college-credit coursework (Capt & Oliver, 2012; Vasquez, 2010; Eppler, Harju, Ironsmith, Marva, 2003). The flexibility in the courses to allow students to decide their pace in the adaptive courses and their topic of writing in their English course allowed for this personalization. It also allows for students to build their confidence by acknowledging their academic growth in the course and building off of success.

Confidence Building

The participants transitioned from feeling nervous and anxious in the beginning of the college experience to feeling confident, empowered and excited after they successfully completed their first semester of courses. This is consistent with the literature that demonstrates that students can often enter developmental education with low self-esteem and -efficacy (Bachman, 2013; Koch, Slate, & Moore, 2012). However, the students did not seem to be discouraged with their placement and felt like it was an accurate assessment of their knowledge. Therefore, it seems that the students’ anxiety did not come from their placement into
development, but more from the fear of the unknown as they were entering into a new experience.

The students` anxiety entering into college could have been amplified by their classification as first generation students. The need for additional support for these students is consistent with the literature which states that services are needed to connect students enrolled in developmental education to the campus and increase their self-efficacy (Koch, Slate, & Moore, 2012). By creating assignments in these courses that connect students to these resources like requiring an appointment with advisor or tutor is one way institutions can ensure students are receiving this extra support.

Using Schlossberg`s (1984) definition of assets and liabilities, students may use their fear of failure as an asset if they learn how to ask for assistance, but it could be a liability as they may leave college if they do not believe they can be successful. These students went into college knowing they may need extra assistance as first generation college students who had taken a break from college before entering into the university. Literature on first generation college students recommends that these students are given an opportunity to share their stress and fears in the beginning of the college process to learn about relevant resources (Berry et al., 2009). The students who participated in the study utilized this option and asked for support from faculty and staff. While student anxiety or nerves may be viewed as a risk factor, it can also be viewed as a natural reaction to a new situation and can make a student more likely to seek out support.

The participants described how they became more confident after successfully completing their developmental education courses. Similar with best practices noted in the literature, these students began their developmental courses in their first semester of college instead of delaying enrollment in these courses (Fike & Fike, 2012). This was based on the
college policy that these courses served as prerequisites in their program of study. Their success is consistent with another study that found that students who enrolled in developmental math during their first semester were more successful than those who delayed enrollment when they tracked grade point average and retention in college (Fike & Fike, 2012).

Another aspect that impacted the participants’ confidence was their support from the faculty, staff and the institution. For these students, making strong connections with their faculty and staff seemed to be more important to them than connecting with their peers. This is inconsistent with the literature that have shown that peer to peer support is the most critical for students in developmental education to build their confidence and motivation to succeed (Pinkerton, 2010; Di Tommaso, 2012). The participants in this study did not seem opposed to interacting with other students, but they preferred to not rely on other students in the program for group assignments. While there was one participant who discussed the value in learning from others in her class, the majority of participants rated group work and discussions lower than individual assignments. Their confidence was built by their individual success and feedback on their academic work by faculty.

Conclusion

The participants’ experience was overall consistent with what a practitioner would expect from researching best practices in developmental education support in the field. The participants’ preference for flexibility and personalization in their education is similar to college students throughout the nation (Kuh et al., 2005). The participants in the study discussed the variety of resources available to them at their private, non-profit institution. The university seems to have additional resources allocated than other universities based on the participants perspective. This is important to note as programs have grown faster than resources have been
allocated at institutions (Brothern & Wambach, 2012; Fike & Fike; 2012; Jaggars & Hodara, 2013).

The ability to navigate resources is vital to student success, particularly for first generation college students (Berry et al., 2009; Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012). The participants’ experience is consistent with other studies that have found that students succeed when they understand the resources that are available to them as well as the reason why the curriculum is important to their overall program and development (Melguizo, Bos, & Prather, 2011; Baer & Duin, 2014). The participants all seemed to find the value in the majority of the courses they were enrolled in and understand how the coursework and resources they were utilizing were supporting them in the overall goal of graduation and career placement.

Family support was an important part of the student experience and took priority in many of the participants’ lives. Since many of the participants had limited time to balance family time and their responsibility to complete their academic work, time with their family often included tutoring or discussions regarding their coursework. Similar to other first generation college students, the participants described a sense of pride and responsibility to be the first in their family to be enrolled in college (Berry et al., 2009).

The literature suggests that both motivation and grit play an important role in student success (Clayton, Blumberg & Auld, 2010; Duckworth & Gross, 2014). The participants in this study demonstrated grit and their motivation to succeed by describing their prioritization of their education. This career ambition was their main motivation which is often what is consistent with the literature as this is the most common motivation of students (Clayton, Blumberg & Auld,
2010). The participants’ grit is essential for their successful transitions and their ability to cope with difficult moments during those transitions (Schlossberg, 1984).

The majority of the literature regarding developmental education describes the importance of institutional resources available to students (Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012; Attewell, 2006). The participants in this study utilized most available resources of which they were aware. Consistent with the literature, these students described how utilizing the resources supported them in all of their courses, not only the developmental education courses (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Daiek, Dixon & Talbert, 2012). These students used resources as a coping method as they were moving through the transition from developmental education to their next level of math, English and science courses (Schlossberg & Chickering, 1995).

Student confidence is significant. It can make a difference if a student begins to believe that successfully completing coursework is possible or is overconfident and does not seek out help when needed. The participants in this study seemed to be confident now that they have seen small success, but they still are seeking out assistance as needed which shows that they do acknowledge that they benefit from resources. This is consistent with the literature that recommend that instruction and support should build up student’s self-efficacy while encouraging ongoing remediation as needed (Baer & Duin, 2014). The conclusions from this study have implications for practice in the field.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this research study suggest that students who enter into developmental education will have a better likelihood to transition successfully into the next level of coursework if they are able to balance their coursework within their life, utilize family and community
support, have motivation and grit, and utilize resources. Through success in developmental education, students will have a foundation to build their confidence which impacts their likelihood to complete their degree and enter the workforce in their program of study. As the nation seeks to improve completion and employment rates, studies that explore factors that impact student success can influence policy and successful practices.

The participants all coped with their transition into college and developmental education in various ways, yet all of their coping mechanisms and experiences can be described utilizing Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1984). As a scholar practitioner, this research can be utilized to understand what a student may be experiencing in their transition into college and developmental education. Strategies to build students’ self-confidence and their likelihood to utilize resources should be prioritized through activities such as new student orientation and advising sessions. College administrators and staff can provide training to their staff and faculty to prepare those interacting with transitions like those the participants experienced. The researcher plans to train the staff in the Student Services department at the institution to understand the coping strategies that Schlossberg (1984) defines in her research.

Building confidence of students like the participant in the first semester of their college journey can make the difference in a student seeking out needed support. Using Schlossberg’s 4S model, advisors and other front line staff can support students in developmental education with their education as well as outside-life transitions. All of the participants had at least one positive interaction with a staff or faculty member whom they felt cared about their success. While the support of faculty and staff is important for all college students, first generation college students may need extra support to feel welcome in the college setting (Berry et al., 2009).
The researcher realized through this study how important the first interactions are for students like those that participated in this study. The researcher plans to implement an orientation experience that takes into account the importance of taking the extra time to answer questions that first generation college students may have when entering college as this made a positive difference for the participants in this study. One important implication from this study is to include family in the discussion if the student requests that they can participate. Therefore, having an open family orientation is an option that colleges should consider. Colleges should place value on supporting staff and faculty members to build these connections and acknowledge team members that have a positive impact on student experience.

All participants in this study successfully completed their developmental education courses on the first attempt which is not the average experience for most students beginning in a developmental education sequence of courses (Bettinger & Long, 2005). Therefore, higher education administrators and faculty should take a deeper look at what makes certain students like these participants successful in a transition in and out of developmental education by observing what resources those students utilized, their background and their motivation. The researcher plans to share overarching themes with the leaders of the institution to influence policy and process at the institution to be more flexible and accommodating for this student population.

Flexibility and structure were extremely important to the participants in this study as they were balancing multiple responsibilities in their lives. As the non-traditional college population is growing, it is important that college administrators take into account the complex life situations that this population experiences. When academic policies are designed, there should be consideration of flexible options for learning, such as adaptive learning and concept based
learning, for non-traditional populations. These should be explored to remain competitive with other institutions that are offering these options.

Financial opportunities were a main motivator for the participants in this study. Creating curriculum that is career focused and reduces the time to earn a degree should be a consideration for this population. Instead of learning general education skills, they were interested in competency based education that would help them accelerate quickly in career fields such as health care, information technology and business. Although students might be learning basic skills in developmental education, they are not becoming qualified for the workforce until they graduate with a credential (Gallard et al., 2010).

Another implication from this study is that family support is important to student success. In order to foster this support, institutions can involve family in activities such as new student orientation. Also, for first generation college students like the participants in the study, it is even more important that family members have access to information to understand the college process. Student advising services should incorporate family resources and should be aware of the unique challenges non-traditional students may face when they have additional family responsibilities that impact their education.

Motivation and grit can be difficult to measure when a student is entering college. As colleges are looking to predict success metrics, attempts to measure motivation and grit should be utilized. Traditional models of using grade point average and standardized test measures should not be the only metrics to predict success. Qualitative methods could be used to learn the prospective students’ stories and ambitions. This could include a survey or essay requirement asking students to describe what motivates them to be successful and what challenges they have overcome to reach their goals.
The participants in this study are non-traditional college students, and their schedules are vastly different than most traditional college students. All participants in the study work full-time, and all are also parents. A few of the participants are single parents and the sole caregiver of their children. Therefore, it is not surprising that these students discussed the importance of their time. Institutions can learn from the needs of non-traditional students and alter their traditional services to support the lifestyles of this population. As a practitioner, the researcher plans to add more evening and weekend hour availability to support students with their studies based on the students’ feedback that additional support around their schedule would be beneficial to their success.

Even though all participants in this study worked full time schedules, their schedules varied drastically. Some of the students work over 40 hours in one position and others work in multiple part time roles. One challenge that multiple participants discussed was the frequency that their work schedules changed and how this impacted their coursework. The students valued that they could submit assignments around their schedule and that they could communicate with academic coaches and advisors around their schedule. Institutions should base services around student needs and consider the option to allow students to make appointments in the evening and weekend hours if requested. For example, students should be able to adjust their schedule from full time to part time status as needed based on life obligations.

While universities are needing to make difficult choices regarding what courses and programs to offer with declining national enrollment and budget cuts, some institutions are cutting developmental education coursework or reducing support for these students. The success of these participants demonstrates the need for successful developmental education resources to
build the confidence and skills of hard working and determined students who only need a refresher in math and writing to succeed in their academic program.

Changes in the researcher`s practice include providing services around the busy schedules of students like the participants in this study. This term, additional weekend and evening hours were added as a result of this study and the students` feedback that support on the weekend is essential to help them complete their assignments around their work schedule. Second, families will now be invited to join the orientation experience the researcher organizes to provide the students with additional family support and understanding. Also, a grit assessment will be added to the orientation experience to determine the student`s level of determination. Lastly, questions about motivation will be added to the first advising sessions with the students so that the advisors can revisit their motivation when challenges arise.

These implications from this study not only apply to higher education administrators, staff and faculty, but also to the larger community. The researcher plans to implement the information learned in her own practice as well as in training with the student services team at the private, non-profit institution where the students are enrolled.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research include a deeper dive into other factors that could impact student success in the transition in and out of developmental education. As the majority of the literature is focused on the transition to college-level coursework, there is a need to expand the conversation to include additional student success stories. (Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Bailey et al, 2010; Frauenholtz & Latterell, 2006). This could include many factors such as the type of institution, program of study, time spent in coursework and modality. Additional demographic
information could also be explored such as age, ethnicity and gender. Additionally, a student’s geographic location and proximity to physical campus resources may play a factor in success. In this study, the students were all utilizing online and remote resources, yet on site resources could play a factor in student success and resource usage.

This research study utilized a series of individual interviews with each participant. There could be value in focus groups to understand the peer to peer interaction of the participants. This study was conducted remotely as students lived throughout the United States and participated over the phone. There may be added value in future research in one geographic location where the researcher meets with the participants in person to discover any non-verbal cues that could add to the narrative.

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1984) was a natural theoretical lens to explore this topic, yet there are other transition theorists that could contribute to the dialogue on this topic. Other transition theories from theorists like Chickering could be explored further. Also, student development theories could be a good lens to utilize to discuss the experience of participants like those that participated in this study.

All participants in this study had completed at least one developmental education course successfully, and many were close to completing their program of study. A recommendation for future research would be to explore the perspectives of students who have successfully completed developmental education at different points in their journey. For example, a student may have successfully completed their first semester of developmental education but still need two to three more courses before entering into their program specific courses.
Another need includes exploring the various placement tests and levels of developmental education. Since students like the participants in this study are entering college with various levels of preparation, most colleges use testing to place students in appropriate courses (Shields & O’Dwyer, 2017). The quantitative and qualitative studies demonstrated the need for accurate placement and for supplemental support for students in developmental education coursework (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006 & Bettinger, & Long, 2005 & Sheldon & Durdella, 2010). In this study, the participants all agreed with their placement which could be attributed to the placement test itself or the advising and support they received before and after taking the placement test. Additional research could be utilized to better understand students’ perception of placement testing and contributing factors that impact their experience.

As many institutions offer multiple courses and formats of developmental education, an analysis of student preference and performance could inform the field on what are the best options for a variety of student populations. Options such as co-requisite models and adaptive learning could be explored further as colleges are looking to reduce the time to degree to remain competitive while not restricting accessibility to their programs. Various studies are needed with diverse student populations to understand what combination of courses work best for students enrolled in developmental education.

This study contradicts the prediction that students who are not required to take foundation reading and writing classes before enrolling in general education courses are more at risk of failing those courses that are reading and writing intensive as these students were allowed to start program specific prerequisites while enrolled in developmental education (Shields & O’Dwyer, 2017). This study suggests that program specific coursework can motivate students to be successful in their developmental coursework.
While the online modality of developmental education courses was not an intended focus on the research study, the participants all discussed the importance of the modality in their success as non-traditional students. There is a need for future research to uncover the impact of success based on the type of modality of developmental education coursework and adaptive learning. Since adaptive learning is beginning to slowly expand in higher education, testing the effectiveness of this method of instructional delivery and making adaptations based on student feedback and success will be important. Data collection and qualitative research will be important in capturing the effectiveness of an adaptive platform and helping institutions decide which courses to offer in this platform.

This study did not address partnerships with local community colleges or high schools as the students that participated were enrolled throughout the nation. Further studies can include unique partnerships within the community that could make a difference in student success. This research could help expand collaborations with local K-12 institutions by modeling efforts that have resulted in success in various school districts throughout the United States (Gallard et al., 2010 & Saxon & Slate, 2013).

The majority of the participants were only enrolled in one level of developmental education coursework while there are students throughout the nation who enroll in multiple levels of developmental education courses before they are eligible to enroll in college level courses. Many of the participants were co-enrolled in college level courses that did not require the prerequisites of math and English which could have impacted their motivation and success. Therefore, exploring course sequencing and co-requisite and pre-requisite models is a recommendation for future research on the topic of student success in developmental education.
Finally, more qualitative studies on students who have been successful in completing developmental education is important as much of the literature discusses the challenges of this population and not the success stories. This study explored the success stories of five participants, and there are thousands of students like them who have a story to tell that could help impact more successful practices in developmental education. Interviewing a larger population sample could help explore this topic further to include additional observations and lesson learned.
Appendices

Appendix A: General Participant Recruitment Email

Subject Line: Invite to Participate in Research Study

Dear (Student),

My name is BriAnne Nichols and I am the System Director of Student Services at the university. I am also a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am researching what experiences students have that successfully complete courses such as MA 090, ENG 090 or PD 090 and continue on to courses in their program of study. My goal is to understand students’ experiences and factors that led to your success.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you about your academic experiences. The expected time commitment is between two and three hours over the course of three interactions (based on your preference, meetings will be over the phone or video chat). You will be offered a $15 gift card for participating.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email me at nichols.br@husky.neu.edu and include the information listed below. I will then contact you to further discuss the opportunity to participate in this study.

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<td>Preferred days and times to meet (including weekends):</td>
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Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Best,

BriAnne Nichols, nichols.br@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B: Recruitment Phone Call Follow Up (Verbal Script)

Hello _____________________.

My name is BriAnne Nichols, and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University, and also the System Director of Student Services. I thought I would call and follow up with you regarding the formal invitation to participate in my research since you indicted interest in participating. Is this a good time of us to connect to discuss any questions you may have and your eligibility to participate in the study? I am calling to inquire if you have any questions about my request as well as ask if you have given any additional consideration to participating? Your participation is entirely voluntary. [The script will emerge depending on the way in which the respondent answers the above questions]
Appendix C: Unsigned Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

**Title:** The Transition from Developmental Education: Exploring the Student Experience

**Principle Investigator (PI):** Dr. Joseph McNabb, Northeastern University

**Student Researcher:** BriAnne Nichols, Northeastern University

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Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. The study will explore your experience in transitioning from developmental education to courses that apply to your major.

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?**

You are being invited to participate in this study because you successfully completed a developmental education course, are receiving Pell grant funding, and are now enrolled in your program of study.

**Why is this research study being done?**

The purpose of this study is to understand student’s experience transitioning to developmental educational coursework to your coursework in your program of study.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews. As noted above, we will have three points of contact. All interviews conducted over the phone or over video conference will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. If you live in the Wisconsin area, you would also have the option to meet in person. Any in person session would also be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

**Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?**

This study will involve three points of contact with the researcher. The first point of contact will be an initial meeting with the researcher (approximately 30 minutes). The second point of contact will be an in-depth interview with the researcher (approximately 45-90 minutes). The third point of contact will be a follow up conversation with the researcher. You can elect to hold
this meeting over phone or video conference (approximately 30 minutes) or you can respond to
the researcher via email (time varies). The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription
and analysis purposes.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort you may feel discussing your personal experience. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide you with resources for seeking additional guidance relative to your situation if needed.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study will raise awareness for the type of support and resources that could benefit students transitioning from developmental education coursework. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of strengthening support services for students.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, and conference presentations) will utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, race, and field of study will be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will utilize the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program and on an external data storage device. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for seven years and then destroyed.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating “pass.”

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
Please contact BriAnne Nichols at (815)592-3119 or via email at nichols.br@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Joseph McNabb, the Principal Investigator, at j.mcnabb@neu.edu if you have any questions about this study.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will be offered a $15 VISA gift card for your participation. This will be mailed to you by the researcher.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

No, if you choose to meet in person, you will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission.

**I agree to [have my child] take part in this research.**

____________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part  Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date
Appendix D: Interview Guide

1. If you were to select one word or phrase that represents your initial thoughts of your initial transition into your coursework- what word or phrase would you use? (pause, then ask) And why?

2. If you could reflect back on your perception of your courses on your first day of class, how would you describe your experience entering into your coursework?

3. Did you use any support services (advising, tutoring, support events)? If so, please describe your experience utilizing these services. Were they helpful?

4. Please describe your experience with the placement testing process.
   - Probe: Do you feel that you were accurately placed into the correct Math, English and Writing courses? Why or why not?

5. There are many outside factors which may have impacted your experience in your developmental education coursework. Can you tell me about a time when any outside factors impacted your success in your courses?
   - Probe: Did you have any outside obligations such as working part-fulltime, family obligations, and unexpected life events.
   - Probe: Did you use other resources or strategies to assist you with your coursework when outside factors was impacting your success?

6. The developmental courses that you enrolled in used a combination of online support, group work, in-class activities, and adaptive assessments - how would you sequence the following 4 methods from #1 favorite to #4 least favorite: (a) online tutoring videos and support, (b) group work (c) in-class activities, (d) adaptive assessments (questions change based on your master of content)
   - Probe: After they lists 1-4 order, ask the participant to explain more about that order
   - Probe: Have your learning preferences shifted over-time?

7. What resources do you feel assisted you to be successful in your MA 090/ENG 090 courses?
   - Probe: What do you think contributed most to your success?

8. What words or phrases would you use to describe the transition from your MA 090/ENG 090 courses to the courses in your program of study?

9. If you were to select 1 key "ah-ha" moment that you've had thus far in your courses, what is that moment? Why was it meaningful and how will it shape the rest of your time here at the university?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experiences thus far either in your courses or as a college student to describe your student perspective?
References


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