

2014

## A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF TEACHER EXPERIENCES IN CREATING AND TEACHING A SENIOR YEAR ENGLISH TRANSITION COURSE

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF TEACHER EXPERIENCES IN  
CREATING AND TEACHING A SENIOR YEAR ENGLISH TRANSITION COURSE

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Kimberly Kaye Creech

Lexington, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

2014

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF TEACHER EXPERIENCES IN CREATING AND TEACHING A SENIOR YEAR ENGLISH TRANSITION COURSE

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to describe a particular phenomenon: the lived experiences of high school teachers who were responsible for creating and teaching a senior-year English Transition Course. Moustakas' methods, framework and data analysis guidelines, coupled with interviews using Seidman's three-interview process, is the best procedure for achieving the research aim. Thus, the study is based upon the results of interviews of 10 high school teachers from schools within a specific geographic region who collaborated with four English faculty members from a comprehensive four-year institution within the same region, over a period of three years. It is important to capture this phenomenon, as it occurred within a time of broad educational reform and uncertainty and will allow others to understand how teachers respond to interventions designed to reduce the need for remediation in reading and writing.

This research examines the following questions: (a) What is the essence of high school teachers' experiences planning a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing? Specifically, how do teachers experience planning as a result of collaborative sessions with University English faculty? Additionally, how do teachers experience planning (e.g., course goals, units of study, individual lessons) as result of their individual efforts? (b) What is the essence of the experience of teaching a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing?

The fundamental textural-structural synthesis revealed four common themes as well as a variety of sub-themes across all participants. Scientific terms were used as metaphors. The juxtaposition of this scientific metaphorical depiction, ostensibly at odds in a study of literacy instruction, intends to reveal the complexity of teacher experiences and the totality of external circumstances as well as internal conditions they encountered. The insights from this study may inform curriculum specialists, policy-makers, school administrators, and English teachers.

Keywords: Transcendental Phenomenology, English Transition Course, School-University Partnership, College Readiness, Professional Learning Community

Author's Signature: Kimberly Kaye Creech

Date: May 5, 2014

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following dissertation, while an individual work, benefited from the insights and direction of several people. First, my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Janice Almasi, exemplifies the high quality scholarship to which I aspire. In addition, Dr. Almasi provided timely and instructive comments and evaluation at every stage of the dissertation process, allowing me to complete this project on schedule. Next, I wish to thank the complete Dissertation Committee, and outside reader, respectively: Dr. Mary Shake, Dr. Susan Cantrell, Dr. Margaret Schroeder and Dr. Jayson Richardson. Each individual provided insights that guided and challenged my thinking, substantially improving the finished product.

In addition to the technical and instrumental assistance above, I received equally important assistance from family and colleagues. My husband, Gregory Dean Creech and daughter, Virginia Kelly Creech, provided on-going support and encouragement throughout my graduate studies. Importantly, I acknowledge this study was possible because of university English faculty, those committed to devote their time and expertise to the three-year partnership with high schools. I also wish to thank Shawn White for his erudite editorial assistance. Finally, I wish to thank the respondents of my study (who remain anonymous for confidentiality purposes). Their comments and insights created an informative and interesting project with opportunities for future work.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This dissertation is a report of a transcendental phenomenological study of high school English teachers who designed and taught a senior-year English Transition course. This study is based upon the results of interviews of 10 high school teachers from schools within a specific geographic region who collaborated with four English faculty from a comprehensive four-year institution within the same region, over a period of three years. The first chapter of the dissertation discusses the background of the study, the research problem, research questions and definitions of special terms. The final sections of the introduction describe the significance of the study and basic assumptions or delimitations.

### **Background**

In 1981, the Secretary of Education created the National Commission on Excellence in Education to study the quality of education in the United States and to create a report, *A Nation at Risk*. *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner et al., 1983) reported that (a) the rising tide of mediocrity in educational foundations threatens the future of our nation, (b) we are less secure as a competitor in the global market, (c) to compete we must reform our educational system and prepare all citizens with the necessary skills to succeed in the information age, (d) individuals who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy and training necessary for the information era will suffer, (e) student achievement has steadily decreased, as evidenced by the fact that only one-third of 17-year-olds can write a persuasive essay and nearly 40% cannot draw inferences from written material, and (f) currently, the average high school graduate is less prepared/educated than the average graduate of 25-30 years ago. These startling findings, reported nearly 30 years ago, were the impetus for several national measures designed to improve our nation's

educational system (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994; No Child Left Behind, 2001; Race to the Top, 2010). Additionally, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2009), an international study that evaluates educational systems across the globe by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students, concluded that U.S. students perform significantly lower than students in many other nations.

Because of the culmination of previous reports and findings, we have currently witnessed the development and adoption of Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010). The standards, which articulate expectations for academic success from kindergarten to the postsecondary level in English and language arts and mathematics, were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce. At present, 44 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories have formally adopted the Common Core Standards (<http://www.corestandards.org/>). This sweeping educational reform provides the foundation for my study that examines the lived experiences of teachers who created and taught a senior year English Transition course designed to reduce the need for remediation in reading and writing.

In their report, “The Essence of College Readiness: Implication for Students, Parents, Schools, and Researchers,” Baker, Clay, and Gratama (2005) claimed that all high school students must receive preparation for college as the 21<sup>st</sup>-century “knowledge economy” dictates higher skill levels. Additionally, the Education Commission of the States (Armstrong, 2005) contends that if high school graduates are to be successful in today’s workforce, they must have a robust high school education and two years of postsecondary education. Armstrong (2005) adds that nearly 97% of high school students

aspire to attend college, but just 60% have acquired the minimum credits for admission. In light of today's educational needs and the confounding problem of a struggling economy, it is imperative that teachers and officials foster initiatives that advance students to postsecondary, credit-bearing coursework and thereby reduce the financial burdens to students and families. Typically, underprepared students are from families of lower socioeconomic backgrounds and it is becoming increasingly difficult for this population to achieve degree status. This study examines the experiences of teachers who have created and taught a senior-year English Transition course designed to reduce the need for remediation in reading and writing.

To illustrate further, a large proportion of students who enter college (40%) are required to take at least one developmental course (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006), usually mathematics (Attewell et al., 2006; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Garcia, 2011; Prince, 2010). ACT, the assessment used to predict college success, found "of the 1.5 million 2010 high school graduates who took the ACT test, only 24 percent met all four college readiness benchmarks for English, Mathematics, Reading and Science and surprisingly 28% met none of the four college readiness benchmarks" (ACT, 2011, p. 3). The most current statistics on ACT performance are quite alarming. NCES (2003) reported that, of the number of entering freshmen at degree-granting institutions (2,396), the percentage of freshman enrolled in developmental reading is 11%, for writing 14%, and mathematics 22%. Typically, failure to meet ACT benchmarks necessitates enrollment in developmental courses. Interestingly, "When reading is at the core of the problem, the probability of success in college appears to be very low" (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000, p. 75) and significantly reduces the chances of completing a degree

(Oudenhoven, 2002). Thus, a high school course designed to reduce the need for remediation in reading and writing should promote college success, but there are few studies that examine how teachers respond to initiatives that center around college readiness.

The statistics surrounding students and college readiness are alarming, and we know the factors that contribute to poor academic performance are complex, but what we do not know is how teachers experience interventions when attempting to reduce the need for remediation. This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of high school teachers who have created and taught a senior-year English Transition course designed to reduce the need for remediation in reading and writing in postsecondary education. Understanding the essence of their shared experiences can assist teachers who may be struggling to overcome the instructional challenges of students who are underprepared.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

High school English teachers are faced with new standards for learning in language arts that emphasize the skills needed for college and career readiness. Several of their students, after taking the ACT exam, do not meet the benchmarks for college preparedness in reading and writing. Teachers find themselves in an environment that requires an understanding of new standards, what it means to be college ready and the unique needs of students who are underprepared. Schools are struggling to address state mandates to reduce remediation, and in doing so must consider various interventions. Thus school curriculum is uncertain, and may undergo several approaches and changes—an additional stressor for teachers who must construct their courses and pedagogy. In Kentucky, where this study takes place, legislation was passed addressing college



readiness, Senate Bill 1 (SB1, 2009). SB1 has several stated goals; however, the overarching objective is to reduce the need for postsecondary remediation by 50% by 2014—an ambitious goal for teachers and school administrators.

Under the current circumstances, teachers encounter considerable challenges and pressures and may even feel a heightened sense of isolation. Researchers agree that partnerships between Universities and secondary schools are crucial in order to develop a seamless transition from secondary to postsecondary coursework. There exists a scant supply of longitudinal empirical research evaluating partnerships, and the existing research is limited in terms of scope and setting. Laguardia (1998) noted, “There is very little knowledge of the factors that make high school and college partnerships successful” (p. 170). Greenberg (1991) argued that more data are needed to evaluate the impact of these partnerships on program participants. Teachers, both high school and postsecondary, have reported difficulty initiating, sustaining and achieving successful partnerships. Often the cultures of the high school settings differ dramatically from those of postsecondary institutions (Nunley & Gemberling, 1999; Azinger, 2000). In the past, high school personnel have resented the impositions of postsecondary faculty whose expectations do not comply with the constraints of high school scheduling, student attitudes, parental involvement and local idiosyncrasies (Warren & Peel, 2005). Additionally, there has been little incentive for postsecondary faculty at four-year institutions to engage in community service projects that do not fulfill promotion and tenure expectations (McGrath & Buskirk, 1997). Nevertheless, during a time of college readiness reform, University-school partnerships have become increasingly important. In light of these circumstances, my colleagues and I assisted with the development of a

senior-year English Transition course, designed for students who did not meet benchmarks for college/career readiness. High school teachers created and taught their course and while doing so, received support from University faculty. An English Transition course is a new approach and we need to know if they are effective and how teachers are experiencing them in their school setting.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to ascertain a fundamental essence of what it was like to create and teach a high school senior-year English Transition course, as well as elucidate the experience of collaborating with University faculty.

### **Research Questions**

This research examined the following research questions as a result of an ongoing, three-year pilot study between a four-year comprehensive University and 16 partnering high schools within an identifiable geographic region: (a) What is the essence of high school teachers' experiences *planning* a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing? Specifically, how do teachers experience planning as a result of collaborative sessions with University English faculty? Additionally, how do teachers experience planning (e.g., course goals, units of study, individual lessons) as result of their individual efforts? (b) What is the essence of *teaching* a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing?

## Definition of Terms

*College Readiness:* ACT defines college readiness as:

The level of achievement a student needs to be ready to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in credit-bearing first-year postsecondary courses. And by postsecondary we mean primarily two-year or four-year institutions, trade schools, and technical schools. Today, however, workplace readiness demands the same level of knowledge and skills as college readiness. While not every student plans to attend college after high school, many of the jobs that can support a family require knowledge and skills comparable to those expected of the first-year college student. (ACT, 2008, p.1)

Because college readiness encompasses a variety of skill-sets, it is difficult to obtain a succinct definition among the various organizations and researchers that focus on this issue. The National Association of Developmental Education and The National Council of Teachers of English do not define college readiness holistically. The Educational Improvement Policy Center provides the following operational definition for college readiness:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program. *Succeed* is defined as completing entry-level courses with a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to be eligible to take the next course in the sequence or the next level course in the subject area. (Conley, 2007, p. 5)

In fact, there is little agreement on what “college-ready” means (Bailey et al., 2010) and if definitions can include cognitive and non-cognitive facets (Porter & Polikoff, 2012).

Kentucky defines college readiness as “the level of preparation a student needs to succeed in credit-bearing courses in college. “Succeed” is defined as completing entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency that prepares the student for subsequent courses.” Kentucky defines career readiness as “the level of preparation a high school graduate needs to proceed to the step in a chosen career, whether that is postsecondary coursework, industry certification, or entry into the work force.” Kentucky uses the following benchmarks as college readiness indicators for English or writing (ACT, 18 or higher; SAT, 430 or higher; COMPASS, 74 or higher and KYOTE, 6 or higher) and reading (ACT, 20 or higher; SAT, 470 or higher; COMPASS, 85 or higher and KYOTE, 20 or higher) (cpe.ky.gov).

*Developmental Education:* The National Association of Developmental Education (NADE) defines developmental education as:

A field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum. Developmental education is sensitive and responsive to individual differences and special needs among learners. Developmental education programs and services commonly address academic preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and affective barriers to learning. Developmental education includes, but is not limited to: all forms of learning assistance, such as

tutoring, mentoring, and supplemental instruction, personal, academic, and career counseling, academic advisement, and coursework.” (<http://www.nade.net/>)

*Developmental Courses:* Developmental or remedial coursework is offered at the postsecondary level and is typically defined as courses, or sequences of courses, that are non-credit bearing and designed to assist students with weak backgrounds in a particular subject areas, such as mathematics, English or reading. Mathematics and English courses prepare students for a credit course in their respective areas, whereas reading usually prepares students for both English and other disciplines.

*Summer Bridge Program:* Summer bridge programs are offered at a variety of grade levels, usually for students who are transitioning to high school or college. In this study, I refer to Summer Bridge programs offered to high school graduates. Summer bridge programs are generally residential, where students live on college campuses; for non-residential/commuters, students visit campuses for the day over an extended period. Summer bridge programs range in duration, usually 4-6 weeks. Most often, these programs cover a wide variety of topics, serving as an orientation to basic skills and knowledge necessary for college academic and social success, but sometimes focus on specific content areas. Additionally, programs may target a specific student population such as first-generation college students, economically disadvantaged students, academically underprepared students and/or students who have excelled in certain areas, usually science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). In general, a summer bridge program is defined as an accelerated program of study that focuses on the skills necessary to be successful, both academically and socially, at the postsecondary

level (Ami, 2001; Buck, 1985; Moore et al., 2007; Morrow & Morrow, 1992; Risku, 2002; Santa Rita & Bacote, 1996; Suhr, 1980).

*Transition Course:* It is difficult to define Transition Course. This is a relatively new term associated with college readiness, but is sometimes synonymous with summer bridge programs, dual credit or other credit-based transition programs (Luna & Fowler, 2011). In terms of this study, Transition Course refers to an English Transition course for high school seniors who have not met benchmarks for college readiness in reading and writing. The course is usually offered as a full-year course, but in some cases schools offer it as a partial-year course. In either case, it is credit-based. Some states have developed online transition courses for content areas, mathematics, reading and English, but the duration, credit/elective status and delivery methods vary (Barger, Murray, Smith, & Blanco, 2011).

*Professional Learning Community (PLC):* Although authors define and characterize PLCs in various ways (Dufour & Eaker, 2005; Hord & Sommers, 2008), each suggest the importance of building trust among members, devoting enough time to cultivate a collaborative culture and having school leaders who are supportive over the long-term. In this study, a PLC refers to a community of high school teachers from a variety of schools within a distinct geographic region, who met monthly to share ideas and develop an ETC. The intra-school PLC was organized and led by postsecondary English faculty over a three-year period, using the Dufour model, which emphasizes (a) students learn, (b) a culture of collaboration, (c) a focus on results and, (d) hard work and commitment. The shared vision was to improve college readiness among high school seniors and assess student scores on pre, formative, and post exams in both reading

(Nelson Denny) and writing (On-demand) through the development and implementation of an ETC. In addition to monthly meetings, an online TLLC (Transition Literacy Learning Community) was established using Blackboard, thereby creating a supplemental communication venue, providing links to college readiness resources, and building a repository of teaching strategies and possible lessons/activities.

### **Significance of Study**

At present, we know there are an alarming number of students who are not prepared for college-level coursework. We also know that students who enter postsecondary-level education with developmental needs have low levels of persistence and graduation rates. We know that in order for students to succeed, they must acquire the requisite skills for college coursework before leaving the P-12 environment. We also know that the factors that contribute to low student achievement are complex and sometimes difficult for teachers to correct.

Additionally, students who need remediation at the postsecondary level have accumulated and internalized negative habits of thinking over several years. Thus, teachers who work with these students at the senior high school level must work to overcome a host of factors that are often not related directly to reading and writing skills. To complicate the issue, teacher preparation programs have not, until recently, emphasized the importance of reading instruction; therefore, high school teachers are not prepared to teach reading strategies.

This study is significant in that it explains the teacher perspective—what it is like to create and teach a course designed to reduce the need for remediation. This study is

important for other teachers and high school administrators who may be considering a similar approach for at-risk students.

### **Basic Assumptions/Delimitations**

One major assumption is that high school teachers need the support of University faculty when creating and teaching a course that is designed to reduce the need for remediation in reading and writing. I also assume that participants in this study were truthful and forthcoming when describing their experiences. A certain degree of trust was established over the course of the two to three years, depending on when participants entered the school-University partnership, and I assume they were open and honest with their descriptions.

To illustrate our relationship, University English faculty met monthly with high school faculty at a centrally located facility. Meetings began in January 2010. University English faculty planned collaborative meetings with a Professional Learning Community (PLC) in mind. Richard DuFour emphasized the importance of collaboration for school improvement and outlines the major objectives of a PLC: ensuring that students learn, creating a culture of collaboration, removing barriers to success, focusing on results, and committing to hard work (DuFour, 2004). Overall, a PLC may be the best method for addressing schooling challenges. Milton D. Cox proclaimed, “faculty learning communities create connections for isolated teachers, establish networks for those pursuing pedagogical issues, meet early-career faculty expectations for community, foster multidisciplinary curricula, and begin to bring community to higher education” (Cox, 2004, p. 5).



We did not set out to prescribe a set of lessons. We began by reviewing developmental course syllabi and entry-level English course syllabi, providing desk copies of textbooks assigned to these courses, discussing admission, testing and placement policies, and sharing our own experiences about teaching developmental courses. With the assistance of postsecondary faculty, ETC teachers designed the course, course content, instructional resources, student learning objectives and best pedagogical practices using the Common Core State Standards Initiative for English Language Arts/Literacy as a foundational guide and reference. Schools were encouraged and supported in tailoring the course to fit their district demographics and school climate. The Common Core State Standards were not officially approved until June 2010; therefore, planning took on multiple “starts and fits” as state and national developments became known.

As our collaborations continued, the monthly meeting took on more of a professional development role, providing instructional strategies for reading and writing. Later, high school teachers who had taught their course for a year became mentors to new participants sharing their experiences and successful lessons with their students. With that said, the findings of this research cannot confirm whether the ET courses were successful; multiple settings were involved, and course content as well as teaching methods varied considerably. Furthermore, because the research was conducted within a distinct geographic region, the findings cannot be generalized to other settings or institutions.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

### **Overview and Introduction**

This study seeks to describe the lived experiences of high school teachers who, through collaborations with University faculty, created a senior-year English Transition course to reduce the need for remediation at the postsecondary level. The purpose of this chapter is to build a strong rationale for the study's purpose and to ground the study within a theoretical frame supported by relevant research. Thus, this chapter includes four sections. The first section provides a historical overview and background information pertaining to developmental education at the postsecondary level, the characteristics of students who take developmental education courses, as well as correlates of enrollment. The second section provides a theoretical framework for understanding underprepared students and their instructional needs, discussing cultural reproduction, sociocultural, self-efficacy, and procrastination avoidance theories. The third section includes a literature review focused on legislative measures that have prompted education reform, research on developmental courses, successes and failures, research on Summer Bridge programs, and research pertaining to senior-year transition courses. The final section illustrates the significance of this study, which seeks to understand the lived experiences of high school teachers who have planned and taught senior-year English Transition courses designed to reduce the need for remediation. Moreover, I recognize the study's implications to educational policy and pedagogical practices, as well as its import to scholars of both literacy and broader academia.

## **Historical Overview and Background Information**

This historical overview consists of three parts: (a) a historical perspective of developmental education, which is intended to provide an overview of the history of developmental education and the varying perspectives on where developmental education should occur; (b) the characteristics of developmental students; and (c) correlates of enrollment in developmental education courses at the postsecondary level.

### **Historical Perspective on Developmental Education**

American higher education has a 400-year history and developmental education has been a component of postsecondary curriculum since the beginning (Arendale, 2002; Casazza, 1999; Parker, Butillos & Behringer, 2010). Throughout this history, developmental education has been viewed both positively and negatively, and been responded to through societal, cultural and political events. Even the terms used to describe developmental education have changed over time to accommodate public and professional perception. Boylan (1999) and Arendale (2002) described the variety of interventions or variations of developmental education provided to underprepared students including tutoring programs, academic advising and counseling programs, learning laboratories, comprehensive learning centers and of course developmental courses, the most common intervention in higher education.

Mary Beth Looby, Delta College administrator and Michigan Developmental Education Consortium (MDEC) Developmental Educator of the Year (as cited in Howell, 2011), provided a comprehensive timeline of developmental education. According to Looby, tutors were provided to those deficient in Latin at Harvard University in 1636, but the idea that non-privileged people could receive education truly began to materialize

with the establishment of Massachusetts Common Schools in 1837. In 1862, the first Morrill Act, establishing Land Grant Institutions, played a pivotal role as many community colleges began to form. During this time, Preparatory Departments at many universities were considered “institutional embarrassments.” In 1871, Harvard required an entrance exam and one-half of the applicants failed. The second Morrill Act in 1890 provided African Americans access to higher education, and in 1901-1902 the first Junior colleges appeared. By 1940, the “open door” concept was widespread, paving the way for the 1944 “GI Bill of Rights,” which gave WWII veterans access to junior colleges. The Truman Commission expanded the two-year college system by declaring access to higher education “a national democratic ideal.” Financial aid opportunities, born from the Higher Education Acts (1965-1992), bolstered the need for remedial education. In 2001, community colleges defended open access and by 2006, some four-year institutions discontinued their remedial education.

Clearly, there have been changes over the years regarding developmental education. This study is a reflection of a new period of change, driven by state legislatures requiring a reduction in the need for remediation (SB1, 2009) and the adoption of Common Core State Standards for College and Career readiness (2010). Additionally, four-year institutions hold different views about the benefits of providing remediation and often relegate this function of education to two-year institutions.

It appears that developmental education resides between competing camps: elitists who believe higher education should not be in the business of remediation and those who advocate for student needs (Arendale, 2002; Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010). The elitists’ view of education and student access is centered on privilege versus rights;

therefore, access to higher education is limited to those who have demonstrated their ability to succeed and higher education should be limited through the application of higher admission standards. Consequently, this view continues to perpetuate the cultural reproduction cycle, providing educational opportunity for those who are privileged. Developmental education, from an elitist point of view, is not part of the educational mission and therefore remediation is recognized minimally, outsourced and/or omitted from higher education curriculum.

On the other hand, those who advocate for student rights view education and access to higher education as a human right. This perspective recognizes remediation as an important educational mission and provides various resources and interventions, including developmental education coursework to assist underprepared, underprivileged students. Essentially, this view attempts to reverse the effects of cultural reproduction. Two-year institutions typically assist underprepared students; however, four-year institutions are also involved. As a result, developmental education exhibits a somewhat elusive past: its relevance and prevalence within higher education institutions are frequently debated and subject to change.

References to developmental education have changed over time, as well (Parker et al., 2010). Members of the professional community have scrutinized “developmental education” to the point that the term “college readiness” has effectively taken its place in many instances. This has been a recent development, largely due to legislative measures such as Kentucky Senate Bill 1 (SB1), intended to bolster college retention and graduation rates. It appears the “field of developmental education” is customarily used to describe the professional community; however, college programs are less likely to use

“developmental education” when describing this aspect of higher education. Lundell and Higbee (2001) said, “there are those who believe the term ‘developmental education’ originated during the 1970’s as a politically correct label coined to avoid offending minorities by referring to them as “remedial,” nontraditional,” or “disadvantaged” (p. 27). The term “college readiness,” as of late, further removes any negative connotations that can be associated with underprepared students.

Currently, postsecondary developmental courses are offered at two-year and four-year institutions, private and public, with the greatest percentage of courses offered at public two-year institutions (Aud et al., 2011). Case in point: The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2003) affirmed that “97% of two-year public institutions and 75% of four-year public institutions offer at least one remedial course” (Garcia, 2011, p. 5). Once more, these numbers illustrate the scope of developmental courses and the potential number of students who need remediation.

### **Characteristics of Students Enrolled in Developmental Education Courses**

The purpose of this section is to describe the various characteristics of students who take developmental education coursework at the postsecondary level. Underprepared students are often considered students from minority groups, but the reality is more complex and not completely clear. Ultimately, it is important for teachers to recognize this diversity when planning and instructing courses designed for remediation.

The current literature base includes studies from both two-year and four-year institutions across several regions of the United States, permitting only cautious conclusions and generalizations about this population of students. Another limitation

involves the use of various methods and data sources (e.g., student surveys, faculty surveys, faculty interviews, registration data and other institutional records) with no evidence of replication at various points in time. A variety of methodological approaches improves reliability within a research design, but it is questionable as to whether their combination here merits a higher degree of confidence in the conclusions. However, some demarcations can be drawn when examining the characteristics of students who are required to take developmental courses.

First, according to these studies, the number of students required to take developmental education courses is slightly higher for Blacks than other categories when considering geographic regions as well as urban vs. rural areas. If we consider the entire United States as our population of students who require at least one developmental education course, then claiming that the majority are from minority groups is an accurate depiction. Other data sources, such as the Carnegie foundation, could provide a mechanism for further investigation; however, it is important to realize that regions of the country or even institutions within a given region can differ dramatically in terms of diversity and on top of that, reporting is inconsistent.

Overwhelmingly, researchers agree that developmental courses have a greater percentage of female students versus male students (Aud et al., 2011; Bailey et al., 2010; Garcia, 2011; Hiemstra, 2006 a,b; Prince, 2010). Most students are required to take a developmental mathematics course (Gracia, 2011; Hiemstra, 2006 a,b; Howell, 2011; Prince, 2010), which may point to learning style differences between males and females and/or the continued need to stimulate interest and bolster confidence for females within this particular subject area. Anecdotally, I see an even distribution of female and male

students in the courses that I teach, developmental reading and developmental English. However, the aforementioned disparity within developmental mathematics courses concurs with previous research and circumstances surrounding female students and their success in mathematics courses. Some high schools have addressed this issue by creating homogeneous mathematics and science courses, understanding that male and female students respond differently to conventional instruction, but this is not a common practice. Markedly, developmental mathematics instructors should consider female students and mathematics instruction and modify their courses and interaction with students to meet their unique needs.

Another characteristic to consider is whether students are full- or part-time. Aud et al. (2011), Bailey (2009) and Hiemstra (2006b) indicated that part-time students require developmental coursework more than full-time students. Crisp and Nora (2010) suggested that full-time students enrolled in developmental coursework are more likely to succeed than part-time students. An additional characteristic is that developmental students are employed while attending school, corroborating lower socioeconomic status indicators that can negatively affect their success rate. Kozeracki (2005) said, “A number of community college developmental instructors mention that even the most motivated students can be derailed by the need to work long hours outside the classroom, especially for those who must work full-time” (p. 41). One might intuitively expect that part-time working students would also be non-traditional students with family responsibilities, but my time at Eastern Kentucky University has not proven this to be the case in all situations. In order to address this characteristic, developmental instructors can be



flexible with assignments and understand that students enrolled in their classes are juggling multiple responsibilities.

Another defining feature is whether students are traditional or non-traditional. Traditional students attend college immediately after completing high school whereas non-traditional students delay college coursework for an extended period. This categorization helps to characterize students who enroll in developmental courses, but age cut-offs and enrollment numbers are inconsistent in the literature. Garcia (2011) defined non-traditional students as 20 years of age or older and cited a National Center for Educational Statistics report (NCES, 1996) claiming that “31% of all entering freshmen who took a remedial class in 1992-93 were 19 years or younger, while 46% were over 22 years of age” (p. 6). In agreement, Aud et al. (2011) cited the NCES 2007-2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, known as NPSAS:08, in which age was segmented into three categories—15-23 (34.6%), 24-29 (39.5%) and 30 or older (38.1%)—and a greater percentage of non-traditional students are reported as taking remedial courses. However, Colorado institutions reported a slightly lower percentage of non-traditional student enrollments in developmental education courses. Similarly, Hiemstra (2006a) and Hiemstra (2006b) indicated significantly larger enrollments for traditional students (age 17-24) than non-traditional (age 25 or older). According to Kozeracki (2005), “a large percentage of those who enroll in developmental classes are traditional-age students who recently graduated from high school and instructors tend to distinguish them into two groups, those who attended poor (academically) public high schools and those who were exposed to good instruction, but did not pay attention” (p. 40). Based on current research, it is difficult to conclude whether most developmental

students are non-traditional or traditional. Anecdotally, the majority (80-90%) of students enrolled in the developmental courses I teach are traditional college students, below 21 years of age.

Additionally, low socioeconomic status (SES), or coming from a low-income family, is associated with the need to enroll in developmental courses and subsequent success (Attewell et al., 2006; Higbee, Lundell, & Duranczyk, 2003; Kozeracki, 2005; Stein, 2005). According to the NCES National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (U.S. Department of Education, 2000), low-income students are more likely to take “remedial” courses than middle- and upper-income students (Higbee et al., 2003). Additionally, Jaggars and Hodara (2011) reported that 46% of students at the City University of New York have household incomes less than \$20,000 and the majority are required to take developmental coursework. This tendency is usually tied to minority groups, specifically African Americans and Hispanics; however, it may be equally relevant for White students from rural areas. In contrast, Attewell et al. (2003) concluded that socioeconomic status does not play a significant role in whether or not students are required to take developmental coursework when academic background and other variables are considered. Interestingly, Knopp (1996) said, “Somewhat more than half of the upper class students of color in U.S. colleges and universities reported taking one or more developmental courses during their college careers” (as cited in Boylan, Sutton, & Anderson, 2003, p. 12). There is conflicting evidence for whether SES is a characterization of this population, but it is an accepted generalization in much of the literature. One way teachers can assist these students is to create custom textbooks that are cheaper for students and then supplement instruction with other resources.

Other characteristics or subgroups that can be identified in developmental education courses include, (a) English as second language learners (ESL), (b) students with disabilities, (c) high school graduates versus GED certificate recipients, (d) first-generation college students, and (e) non-traditional students with prior military experience.

First, ESL students are not clearly defined in the literature base. The assumption is these students are from immigrant families who struggle with language acquisition and sociocultural issues imposed by the dominant culture (Crisp & Nora, 2010), but they can also be students who come to the U.S. from other countries to complete their college degrees. This varies according to region, but the literature base does not offer a definitive explanation of ESL students within developmental courses. I have experienced a large number of students from Saudi Arabia, who usually complete a full sequence of developmental reading courses, ENR 090 and ENR 095, to prepare for credit-bearing work. These students do not necessarily struggle with reading and comprehension, but lack the background knowledge and vocabulary needed for American college courses. Also, a modicum of students come from Korea, Japan and China, but these are often exchange students who are finishing their senior year of Baccalaureate studies in their home country and take developmental courses as an option to fulfill graduation requirements. Again, the research base alludes to the presence of an ESL subpopulation within developmental courses (Jaggars, 2011), but there is little empirical evidence to discuss enrollment numbers and characteristics of this sub-group. Thus, instructors must be adept at differentiating instruction to advance the variety of skill levels existing within this subgroup.

Another characteristic or subgroup is students with disabilities. According to Bangser (2008), “the rate of attending postsecondary education by people with disabilities has increased, with much of the enrollment for students with disabilities at community colleges” (p. 4). Clearly, students with disabilities are increasingly enrolling in developmental education courses, but this subgroup has been grossly overlooked within the literature base. This is an important trend, as instructors not only encounter literacy deficiencies with students with disabilities, but must also accommodate learning, behavioral, hearing and vision impairments that can impede student progress.

Another characteristic of students enrolled in developmental education courses include students with GEDs versus high school diplomas. First, GED students may be traditional in terms of age, completing their GED credential in lieu of attending high school, or they can be non-traditional students. Hiemstra (2006a,b) reported a sizeable number of GED students and 81.5% were considered underprepared. Nonetheless, my review reveals a limited explanation of this subgroup. In any case, GED students, whether traditional or non-traditional, offer characteristics that instructors might consider. These students likely encounter work and family responsibilities, have been away from an educational environment for some time and/or have trouble traversing traditional classroom environments.

Another characteristic or subgroup includes first-generation college students. Jagers and Hodara (2011) claimed that 48% of their students within the higher education system are first-generation college students and the vast majority of this student population is required to take at least one developmental education course. First generation college students are an area of interest for higher education studies, and their

predominance in developmental courses is well known, but this subgroup was not a variable in the studies covered by this review. Developmental course instructors must recognize this factor and understand that students often do not have support from home or academic role models to guide their decisions. Many struggle with pressures from home and ultimately give up on their personal goals, questioning their decision to go to college and their ability to succeed.

Finally, students with prior military experience are an emerging subgroup or characteristic of developmental education students. Current research has largely ignored the potential subgroup of non-traditional students with prior military experience. Over the last few years, I have seen a growing number of students, usually male, who have served in the military and later seek college educations that require some developmental education coursework; however, this subgroup does not appear in the studies included in my review. Overwhelmingly, prior military students demonstrate a strong work ethic and are extremely successful with the developmental courses I teach.

### **Correlates of Enrollment**

Typically, ACT scores are the most widely used metric to determine college readiness, acting as a correlate or predictor of enrollment in developmental education courses. Minimum ACT scores that indicate whether a high school graduate is ready for college credit-bearing work are English (18), mathematics (22), reading (21) and science (24) (ACT, 2009). Individual states and institutions may apply different standards.

Kentucky uses the following for reading: an ACT reading subtest score of 15 begets a placement in ENR 090; 16-18 in ENR 095, and 19-20 in ENR 116. In addition, colleges and universities use other exams to measure college readiness and determine placement,

such as COMPASS, ACCUPLACER and Nelson-Denney. However, their usage and cut-off scores vary per institution and are not always viewed as accurate predictors (Jaggars, 2011).

Schooling attributes such as high school curriculum, high school student body composition as well as teacher attainment are typically viewed as predictors of the need for developmental coursework. Interestingly, school curriculum may not be a strong indicator of whether or not a student will be required to take developmental courses. The National Educational Longitudinal Study, known as the NELS: 88, collected family and academic background information from a representative sample of the nation's eighth grade students and found that enrollment in college developmental coursework is not limited to students with low academic skills and poor curricular preparation in high school (Attewell et al., 2006). By comparison, teacher attributes and school composition are greater indicators of whether or not a student will be required to take developmental courses. Howell (2011), studying various high school settings, concluded that (a) the need for developmental coursework at the college level diminishes with an increase in the number of teachers with master's degrees, (b) the need for remediation increases with a higher number of teachers operating with emergency credentials, and (c) a large African American or Hispanic student body increases the need for remediation.

Other predictors beyond educational contexts include the influences of sociocultural/family backgrounds and parental education attainment. Howell (2011) found that the cumulative influences of family, peers, teachers and schools largely determine whether or not students will succeed once they reach postsecondary level coursework. According to Crisp and Nora (2010), parental education is another

predictive variable and significant for developmental students. Minority groups, who encounter dissimilar experiences compared to the dominant culture, are of particular interest when looking for correlates of enrollment.

Amidst these many correlates, it is difficult to present a cohesive snapshot or characterization of developmental students. The current literature base provides reports and studies that target specific geographic regions, particular settings (usually urban), or certain minority groups within a given region, making broad generalizations to an entire population of U.S. students problematic. One particular trend is apparent: more females have a greater need for developmental education coursework. Minority groups are usually identified as an overrepresented population, but this may be attributed to the regions and setting where these studies take place, which would suggest that the percentage of students enrolled in developmental courses across race is not as disparate. There are conflicting reports about the influence of SES too, which suggests the need for additional research. It is also uncertain how family background plays a role.

One trend is clear: namely, that developmental students exhibit “avoidance” behaviors and find ways to circumvent taking developmental coursework (Bailey, 2009; Hiemstra, 2006; Jaggars, 2011). It is not clear if the development timeframe of this behavior (i.e., before, during or after high school) plays a role in college readiness, or if “avoidance” is simply a mechanism to avoid completing developmental courses. However, self-efficacy theory asserts that students who are not self-efficacious will tend to avoid or resist completing tasks. Based on the findings of this review, additional research using Bourdieu’s theory of cultural reproduction (1977), Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1934) and Bandura’s self-efficacy (1987) theory as a conceptual

frame could extend our understanding of students who take developmental courses. Even more, Ferrari's Procrastination Task-avoidance Theory (1995) could provide additional insights to student avoidance behaviors as a defining trait. These theories are examined more fully as a means of explaining how students in developmental education operate and how teachers who teach underprepared students in a senior-year English transition course experience creating and teaching a course for said students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework will consist of four sections: (a) cultural reproduction theory, (b) sociocultural theory, (c) self-efficacy theory, and (d) task-avoidance theory. Clearly, self-efficacy theory provides a basis for understanding underprepared students. Foremost, student self-efficacy is either positively or negatively influenced by the decided attributes of cultural reproduction and sociocultural theories and is manifest in behavioral actions associated with procrastination task-avoidance theory. Thus, the theoretical framework is presented with a chronological context in mind, outlining theoretical perspectives as they influence student academic performance over time.

I encounter students who enter college at the developmental course level, who have been shaped by family, cultural and educational influences over several years and possess academic and dispositional challenges. Many of them are first-generation college students who receive little support from home, both financially and academically. For some, the alienation experienced among family parallels feelings of intimidation in the higher education environment, much of which stems from linguistic uncertainty and low self-efficacy. That said, children begin to internalize beliefs about their capabilities during the first years of their life, a time of language acquisition and exposure or lack of



exposure to the values of dominant culture. Theorists have examined the powerful influence of language, culture and agency. For example, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) refers to language as “symbolic capital” and asserts that language is powerful in terms of what drives a society or culture. Additionally, languages (a form of “cultural capital”) are a commodity with long-term net worth. His term “symbolic violence” refers to a disproportionate balance of power in terms of language currency or “cultural capital”; and when this balance of power or control is tipped, an unfair playing field is created. I sense that developmental education students—in other words, students who are considered “underprepared” as a result of not meeting ACT benchmarks for reading (20 or higher) and/or writing (18 or higher)—have internalized this “tipping of the balance” and consequently lack self-efficacy and the internal motivation to learn.

Bourdieu provides a conceptual understanding of cultural influences that impact student success outside of and even prior to academic experiences. Vygotsky, Bandura and Ferrari augment this concept with their theoretical viewpoints and offer a means of understanding and reversing the negative effects, thereby promoting agency. Therefore, the following theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding these students: cultural reproduction, sociocultural, self-efficacy and procrastination task-avoidance theories.

### **Cultural Reproduction Theory**

Pierre Bourdieu came from a peasant background in France and was the first in his family to graduate from high school (Longden, 2004), yet his work continues to inform empirical research and theory about education and social inequalities. He

synthesized philosophy, social anthropology and sociology to form his scholarship that demonstrated a passion for social justice, resulting in his cultural reproduction theory.

Cultural Reproduction Theory (CRT) has provided a mechanism for understanding academic attainment across national borders, educational domains and the education profession. Most scholars agree that aspects of Bourdieu's CRT, specifically habitus and cultural capital are unclear and difficult to operationalize (Archer, 1993; Jaeger, 2011; Shirley, 1986; Sullivan, 2001, 2002); nevertheless, his contributions are considered significant when scrutinizing the sociology of education (Shirley, 1986; Sullivan, 2001, 2002).

To oversimplify, CRT asserts that subordinate classes or individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds usually fail the education system (often aligned with postsecondary education) because it is ruled by dominant classes or individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The cultural structure or attitudes, beliefs and activities of individuals defined by these class distinctions are the predictors of educational success and the system of "schooling" supports or reproduces that which is valued by the dominant culture, thus maintaining a status quo. Bourdieu (1977) describes cultural reproduction in the following statement:

Because the profits of these institutions are the object of differential appropriation, objectification also and inseparably ensures the reproduction of the structures of the distribution of the capital, which, in its various forms is the precondition for such appropriations, and in so doing, reproduces the structure of the relations of domination and dependence. (p. 184)

Adding to Bourdieu's ideas, Shuker (1981) offers another valuable insight:

It can be argued that schools don't simply 'process people'; they help create and legitimate forms of consciousness, which underpin the maintenance of existing sets of –socioeconomic relationship. The notion of hegemony is basic to any explanation of how such a process occurs. (p. 34)

Clearly, the central tenets of this theory relate to my study where high school teachers have created and taught a high school senior-year English course designed to achieve college readiness. As the research suggests, underprepared students often lack academic role models and life experiences that result in academic achievement—important factors for educators to consider when designing instruction for these students. It is imperative to note Bourdieu's critics and the difficulty teachers face when addressing *cultural capital* and *habitus*, much of which is influenced outside of school settings and/or beyond classroom experiences.

Archer (1993) provides a scathing analysis of Bourdieu, accusing him of advancing a general theory that is isolated to the French system of education (De Graaf, De Graff, & Draaykamp, 2000; Shirley, 1986; Sullivan, 2002). With this in mind, cultural reproduction is concerned principally with habitus and cultural capital. Habitus, or dispositions, are developed first in the home by means of inculcation and later refined in "schooling." Bourdieu associated habitus with the internalization of linguistic knowledge or "mother tongue" foremost; however, other discrete dispositions appear, but remain imprecise. Bourdieu (1977) said,

The habitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of

lasting dispositions, in the organisms (individuals) lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same material conditions of existence. (p. 85)

Cultural capital, on the other hand, is transmitted to students based on their socioeconomic status and family assemblage, referring to “linguistic, stylistic and knowledge attributes which can enhance one’s position in the cultural field” (Shirley, 1986, p. 99). Cultural capital is characterized in a variety of ways, resulting in inconsistent conclusions within empirical studies designed to measure academic attainment. For example, Sullivan (2000) characterized cultural capital as activities, reading type, television type, music type and participation in art gallery, theatre and concerts. Shirley (1986) characterized cultural capital as modes of leisure, arts consumption and titles or degrees. De Graff et al. (2000) characterized cultural capital as parental years of education, fathers’ occupational status, parental beaux-arts participation and parental reading habits. Jaeger (2011) measured cultural capital using children’s participation in museum attendance or musical/theatrical performance, as well as their reading habits and extra-curricular activities. Sullivan (2002) said, “The majority of studies show that cultural participation is associated with educational attainment, but that a substantial social class effect remains unexplained by “cultural capital,” however it is measured” (p. 162).

The theory of cultural reproduction, specifically “habitus” and “cultural capital,” plays a significant role in understanding developmental education and transition courses. Often, the habitus of these students is the result of an inculcation that differs from dominant culture and students have not experienced a cultural playing field that

contributes to academic success. Thus, high school transition teachers should highlight this disparity for students, discussing their experiences as a struggling first-generation student if applicable, providing/suggesting opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities, taking students to college campuses and field trips to museums, plays or musical events, and so forth. Any effort to present experiences that are valued by dominant culture can assist students who are underprepared.

Most have not experienced success academically, largely due to cultural/attitudinal differences and often harbor resistance towards “schooling” and the dominant culture. Teachers can avoid overly criticizing errors with Standard English (SE), yet emphasize the importance of academic discourse and stress the need to understand and apply SE in coursework while accepting both dominant and secondary codes for communication within appropriate settings and communication purposes. In sum, teachers can establish a climate that respects diverse cultural backgrounds and means of expression.

Ironically, Bourdieu himself symbolizes an exception to his theory of Cultural Reproduction, which seems particularly relevant to students who enter postsecondary institutions underprepared, as well as instructors who teach developmental education and high school transition courses. Bourdieu specifically mentions higher education systems, which perform much of the empirical research and analyses of “schooling” entities. This study offers an exploration of teacher experiences with students who are underprepared in a high school setting, which may contribute to a better understanding of the influence of cultural reproduction within another schooling entity. Applying Bourdieu’s theory to studies aimed at understanding this unique population, before they enter postsecondary

institutions, could contribute considerably to the literature base. There is a pronounced instance of low socioeconomic backgrounds among students where this study takes place; therefore, the effects of cultural reproduction are heightened in comparison to other geographic regions, making it even more important for teachers involved in this study to recognize and implement activities and instruction that promote dominant culture values.

As it stands, CRT may be the most difficult to address within the classroom setting; however, opportunities to attend cultural events, museums and other activities outside of the school are imperative. Researchers have found cultural capital plays a significant role in academic attainment, but many students do not benefit from out-of-school environments/family history/experiences that build cultural capital and thus teachers must find ways to fill this gap. Importantly, students should be encouraged to engage in extracurricular activities and schools should offer assistance to families/students who do not have the financial means necessary to participate. Any measures that reverse the effects of cultural reproduction within the school or classroom setting are of interest, but until researchers conceptualize cultural capital both “in school” and “out of school,” it is hard to know how to break the reproductive cycle. This study, which examined the experiences of high school teachers who created and taught an English transition course to underprepared students, provides insights into the effects of cultural reproduction—how it is encountered and addressed within the classroom setting.

### **Sociocultural Theory**

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934), a Russian psychologist, is recognized as the founder of Sociocultural Theory (Gredler, 2009; John-Steiner, 1996; Koshmanova, 2007; Kozulin, 1986; Lantolf, 2000; McGlonn-Nelson, 2005). Sociocultural Theory

(SCT) and the Cultural-historical approach are both referenced in the literature base, but are synonymous (Cole, 1985; Gredler, 2009; Koshmanova, 2007; Thorne, 2005). SCT, developed during the mid-1920s, offers an alternative to Behaviorist theory, where knowledge and cognitive skills are considered independent of context and intention. Additionally, contrary to the reductionist view in which a static universe and unchangeable laws determine categories with impenetrable boundaries, SCT is a dialectical concept recognizing the complexity and contradictions of relationships between social and individual interactions (Mahn, 1999). SCT asserts that individuals employ culturally based symbols (language) and tools, which differ across historical periods, to master and advance their thinking through socially situated contexts. In other words, meaning is transformed through interactions of everyday living (schooling, work, family). Wertsch (1991) provided three basic themes in a Vygotskian, sociocultural approach to mediated action: (a) a reliance on genetic, or developmental, analysis, (b) the claim that higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social life, and (c) the claim that human action, on both the social and individual planes, is mediated by tools and signs.

Moreover, activity is not “in the minds” of individuals, but begins on the social plane (interpsychological) and is then interpreted on the individual plane (intrapsychological) (Penuel & Wertsch , 1995); similarly, the co-construction of knowledge is dependent upon both individual and social processes (Mahn, 1999). To help illustrate this relationship, Vygotsky conducted studies that revealed that mediation is developmental and improves with age. Students initially rely on external assistance (tool-mediated, goal-directed action), but as they grow older, this dependence diminishes

as external mediation is internalized (Lantolf, 2000). Students in developmental courses, however, continue to require assistance with external mediation. These students have yet to internalize agency and goal-directed action. SCT stresses that cognitive development is not enacted by an “individual” reacting to the environment, but co-constructed through interactions with “others” who use established cultural tools designed for knowledge advancement within contextualized environments. This aspect is relevant to my study in that it looks at underprepared high school students who need direction from their teachers, the latter of whom help students establish internal mediation of cultural tools and create cooperative learning opportunities to achieve specific learning goals. Additionally, students are offered opportunities to share experiences and taught how to work together in a collaborative format to solve problems.

Secondly, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was developed towards the end of Vygotsky’s life, and was thus not fully elaborated and sometimes misconstrued (Lantolf, 2000; Mahn, 1999). However, this concept is relevant to my study because underprepared students read and write at levels below their peers and require instruction and materials within their zone of proximal development. Vygotsky’s (1978) own definition is cited on multiple occasions as “the distance between the actual developmental level determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). This concept has guided differentiation in classroom practices, as teachers recognize that multiple ZPDs will be present within a group or classroom. For individual growth to occur, students must be presented with tools and artifacts slightly below their determined level of independence. This practice



challenges students to learn difficult material, while avoiding the frustration of dealing with concepts that require adult or peer guidance. This is where the teacher's role is critical. The teacher has to ascertain levels of independence among the students in their classrooms and provide learning situations that are challenging, yet are achievable through student effort. The careful scaffolding of activities, such that difficult concepts and skills are acquired one step at a time, moves students toward independence and success, thus building mastery and self-efficacy. This study will examine how teachers prepare their classes and work to scaffold students' learning. Thus, an understanding of pedagogical practices will provide an opportunity to discuss whether this aspect of instruction is addressed appropriately.

Vygotsky has not escaped criticism (Kozulin, 1986; Thorne, 2005), but more importantly, there is little consensus on the definition of key concepts that inform his theory such as "culture" and "cultural practices." Interestingly, culture and cultural practices are explained in various ways. For example: (a) culture is a way of being or living determined by environment and can vary when environments change, (b) cultural practices are seen as activity, context, event and situation that humans try to manage and make sense of and create order to their lives, and (c) culture is seen as valid internalization of processes for solving problems associated with environment or an external adaptation that is passed on to younger members of the culture (Alfred, 2002; Cole, 1985; McGlenn-Nelson, 2005; Sawyer, 2002). When synthesized, each explanation illustrates the complexity of culture on learning and interestingly concurs with Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction in that students come to schooling situations with cultural influences, some positive and others negative.

In response to these ideas, Alfred (2002) claims that individuals float in and out of many cultures, meaning that culture is not bound by time or content, and she further questions whether it is even possible to create an inclusive learning environment. As a whole, however, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of cognitive development and meaning making has helped shape instruction, curriculum, assessment and research in the educational field. When considering students in postsecondary developmental and high school transition courses, classrooms should ideally be student-centered, where discussions among peers occur more often than instruction/discussions provided by the instructor. Students work in groups to solve real world or at least relevant problems, sharing personal knowledge and experiences. The teacher does not dispense knowledge, but provides the appropriate tools and/or methods for finding the appropriate tools, so students can work together to find plausible solutions to challenging tasks. This conception of the student-teacher relationship does not suggest that teachers avoid dispensing knowledge; however, the negotiation of classroom space is centered on student activity. This theory is relevant to my study in that it explains the necessary instructional practices for students to achieve college readiness.

Before summarizing Bandura's Theory of Self-efficacy, it will be valuable to summarize the distinctions between Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Reproduction and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Wertsch (1998) synthesizes these conceptions in the following statement:

The reason for using a cultural tool is not so simply tied to superior levels of performance; instead, the use of a particular mediational means is often based on

factors having to do with historical precedent and with cultural or institutional power and authority. (p. 42)

Vygotsky and Bourdieu's work are situated within different historical and geographical contexts, 1920s Russia and 1960s France, respectively. Vygotsky stressed that knowledge is transformed through social interaction whereas Bourdieu said knowledge is culturally transmitted. Vygotsky was concerned with language acquisition, meaning-making and higher-order thinking, and he focused his research on young, exceptional children. Bourdieu, on the other hand, was concerned with academic attainment and centered his theory on policies and practices in higher education. Both of these theories explain the influences of family, culture and social interactions over time and how some students find themselves underprepared or demonstrating poor academic achievement and require a targeted intervention—in this case, a high school English transition course that seeks to foster college and career readiness. It is important to recognize the knowledge transformation/transmission distinction because underprepared students, and teachers who address their needs, are confronted with both influences and must look for positive ways to build knowledge and overcome obstacles that impede academic attainment.

### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

Albert Bandura, born in 1925, is known as the originator of Self-efficacy Theory (1987). As an extension of his Social Cognitive Theory (1986, 1987), Self-efficacy Theory explains the relationship between people's beliefs about their ability to succeed in any given task and their actual achievement outcomes (Franzblau & Moore, 2001; Green, 2003; Hammond & Feinstein, 2005; Joet, Usher, & Bressoux, 2011; Luszczynska, 2005;

McCabe, 2006; Pajares & Johnson, 1993, 1995; Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010; Sander & Sander 2006; Usher & Pajares, 2006).

Before summarizing Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory (SET), it is important to recognize a similar idea, self-concept, which is slightly different from SET, as well as the distinction between global and specific self-efficacy measures. Self-concept changes over time and refers to a person's overall perception of him or herself based on environmental interpretations, most notably through reinforcement of significant others (Sander & Sander, 2006; Schunk, 1987). General self-efficacy is the belief that one can tackle challenging tasks and overcome adversity, measured by a general sense of confidence, whereas specific self-efficacy is tied to a particular task or domain such as reading or mathematics (Green, 2003; Luszczynska, 2005; Pajares, 1996).

SET is linked to various aspects of human functioning and behavior, but for expediency, I will focus on its application within the academic realm. There is considerable evidence to support SET's utility and value in predicting performance in schooling (Usher & Pajares, 2006), most often with relationships between self-efficacy and writing and/or mathematics (Bandura, 1993; Joet et al., 2011; Pajares, 1996; Pajares & Johnson, 1995; Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010; Zimmerman, 1992). SET intertwines a host of behavioral patterns or thought processes such as student interest, goal setting, motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), task persistence, engagement and resistance, but I will focus my discussion on the essential premise of this theory. Bandura (1993) said,

Effective intellectual functioning requires much more than simply understanding the factual knowledge and reasoning operations for given activities thus; people make causal contributions to their own functioning through mechanisms of

personal agency. None is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives. These self-efficacy beliefs produce diverse effects through four major processes, cognitive, motivational, affective and selection. (pp. 117-118)

Moreover, students' beliefs about their own capabilities may not necessarily be accurate, but they will nonetheless self-impose a level of persistence and willingness for undertaking challenging tasks (Luszczynska, Gutierrez-Dona & Schwarzer, 2005).

Pajares and Johnson (1993) stated that, "what people do is often better predicted by their beliefs about their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing" (p. 2). Students derive self-efficacy from four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social or verbal persuasion and physiological emotional states (Margolis & McCabe, 2006; McCabe, 2006; Usher & Pajares, 2006). Teachers need to routinely provide or build these types of experiences in their classrooms, recognizing that each source of self-efficacy plays a vital role in student perceived ability and the probability of academic success.

Mastery experiences or Enactive Mastery is the most powerful predictor of success and influential source of self-efficacy (Joet et al., 2011; McCabe, 2006); it represents occasions when students interpret a task performance as a success. Vicarious experiences are instances where students see a task completed successfully by a peer or person they can relate to and then believe they are capable of the same. Verbal or social persuasion refers to the messages that students receive about their ability to complete a particular task. These messages can come from parents, teachers and other peers, but the

receiver must deem them credible in order to influence self-efficacy. The last source of self-efficacy, physiological emotional states, refers to the students' own reactions before or while engaging in a task such as shaking, nervousness, anxiety and stress, any of which can provide success cues (if minimal or the student perceives he or she has high self-efficacy for coping with challenging conditions) or failure cues. In short, students read their own body language and make judgments about their competency based on these aroused states. Recently, comparing postsecondary students enrolled in a developmental reading course with students enrolled in a first-year, for-credit English course, Cantrell et al. (2013) found that "students in developmental reading courses have lower levels of self-efficacy for reading, in both academic and personal contexts, as compared to their peers" (p. 25) and recommended,

(a) teaching strategies for understanding difficult texts, including knowledge needed to transfer strategies to a range of contexts, (b) emphasize modeling and social interaction as a critical feature of instruction and learning, (c) provide regular positive feedback and opportunities for goal attainment, (d) use high interest texts in developmental courses, (e) link personal and academic reading within the developmental reading curriculum, and (f) be sensitive to students' affective state, and teach students strategies for managing negative physiological responses to reading. (Cantrell et al., 2013, pp. 28-30)

My study seeks to explain the experiences of teachers who have created and taught an English Transition course for students who have not met academic benchmarks for college readiness and demonstrate low self-efficacy. Understanding how teachers encounter these students and provide instruction to meet their unique needs is important

to others who may be considering the development of a course targeted specifically to at-risk students.

A criticism of SET is its focus on the individualized self or self-directed action at the expense of attending to social selves who engage in social action, thus suggesting a Western view that may not be applicable in other cultures where outcomes are seen as more dependent upon external conditions beyond individual control (Franzblau & Moore, 2001; Sander & Sander, 2006). To illustrate, Markus and Kitayama (1991) said:

While Bandura's conception of self-efficacy sees people in dynamic relationships with their environment, it perhaps does not have a sufficiently specific focus on the social environment, which is integral to the interdependent cultural perspective that is usually contrasted with the independent perspective" (as cited in Sander & Sanders, 2006, p. 31).

Several studies have addressed self-efficacy and how it can be attributed to enculturated norms. Franzblau and Moore (2001) suggest that SET perpetuates the power of dominant groups, creating the illusion that powerless people could control their behaviors if they wish while ignoring group characteristics of class, race, gender, age and other factors. Researchers have addressed other contexts. For example, Joet et al. (2011) examined perceived self-efficacy and mathematics skills between boys and girls in France (elementary schools), looking at self-efficacy in another context where "few studies of self-efficacy and no studies of its sources have been undertaken" (p. 651). The authors also point to other studies, such as Franzblau and Moore (2001), which look at culture and ethnicity (Klasson, 2004; Usher & Pajares, 2006; Stevens, Olivares, & Hamman, 2006). Bandura (1993) himself supported the relationship between SET and

the sociocultural stance, saying that “children’s intellectual development cannot be isolated from the social relations within which it is imbedded or from its social consequences” (p. 137).

Markedly, SET proves to be particularly applicable to underprepared, struggling students. In fact, schooling should strive to supply the necessary tools and provide work that is attainable, resulting in success and thus building self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Joet et al., 2011; McCabe, 2006). We clearly see the relationship between Vytotsky’s zone of proximal development and instructional practices that are influenced by this concept and the precipitous nature of student self-efficacy; a cycle of performance outcomes and beliefs that are tied to the application of these theoretical concepts. At-risk students, compared to students who have internalized a positive belief system, require materials and instruction that moves them towards independence and experiences that lead to successful outcomes incrementally and repeatedly. This study seeks to examine the experiences of teachers who work with students with low self-efficacy and what it means to teach a course to this population of students. That said, teachers should understand that changing SET, once formed, takes time (Bandura, 1993; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; McCabe, 2006). This study will shed light on whether this understanding of student learning is present when ETC teachers plan and teach their courses. As Bandura and Schunk (1981) said, “it may require mastery experiences over a period of time before the self-efficacy derived from progressive successes creates strong interest in activities that were disvalued or even disliked” (p. 597). Several authors explain how SET building might look or sound in the classroom. For example, teachers can encourage students to set attainable short-term (proximal) goals with tasks of moderate challenge, while



conveying “relevant knowledge and strategies in graduated steps, through instructional aides and modeling” (Bandura, 1993, p. 139).

Margolis and McCabe (2006) and McCabe (2006) provide categorical recommendations (SET sources): (a) reinforce accomplishments with such phrases as, “you got all the sounds in the word correct,” “now you have the knack of it,” or “you understood what you read,” (b) promote vicarious experiences by pairing low self-efficacy students with other students to whom they can relate, (c) focus on making effort statements (e.g., “you put a lot of time into this and did a good job”) to students who view failure or setback as a result of low ability rather than effort, and (d) recognize heightened emotional states and help students cope with challenging situations (relaxation techniques and/or referral to counselors). Margolis and McCabe (2006) suggest that the teacher’s ultimate responsibility is to replace unproductive behaviors, avoidance, and diminished interest and achievement with optimistic personal belief systems or habits of thinking that will serve students throughout their lives. In sum, an SET-building classroom will exude a positive learning climate through both teacher and peer modeling. Tasks will be chosen carefully and limited to manageable, attainable goals, thus affording opportunities for mastery and success. A pedagogical practice that integrates the four sources of self-efficacy, over time, can improve student motivation and promote propitious academic dispositions. Ultimately, the teachers that I interviewed should recognize student self-efficacy and demonstrate how they create learning situations that build mastery, vicarious, verbal persuasion and improved physiological state experiences in the classroom.

## **Procrastination Task-Avoidance Theory**

A variety of psychologists have studied the behavior and personality traits of individuals who delay action, both in academic and everyday life situations. Joseph Ferrari's work seeks to understand and define procrastination as a form of task-avoidance, resulting in the procrastination task-avoidance theory (PTAT). Ferrari and Diaz-Morales (2007) clarify that chronic procrastination, or needless delay of meeting deadlines with a specific timeframe, is characterized by two motives, avoidance and arousal. Typically, arousal motives are associated with procrastination behaviors that create a sense of pleasure when rushing to meet a deadline; whereas avoidance motives are influenced by the tendency to postpone activities that are perceived unpleasant to prevent receiving negative information about personal performance or failure (Ferrari, 2000; Ferrari & Diaz-Morales, 2007; Nurmi, Aunola, Salmela-Aro, & Lindroos, 2003).

The concept of task-avoidance has been described in a variety of ways including self-handicapping strategy, procrastination and maladaptive motivational style (Nurmi et al., 2003). Additionally, mastery/performance/achievement avoidance goals constitute another realm of inquiry related to task-avoidance (Madjar, Kaplan, & Weinstock, 2011; Nasiriyani, Azar, Noruzy, & Dalvand, 2011; Schnell, Brandstatter, & Knopfel, 2010). All suggest the desire to avoid failure in academic contexts and are associated with low self-efficacy (Ferrari, 2000; Heimerdinger & Hinsz, 2008; Klassen, Krawchuk, & Rajani, 2008; Nasiriyani et al., 2011; Rabin, Fogel, & Nutter-Upham, 2011; Strunk & Steele, 2011; Tan et al., 2008; Wolters, 2003). Ferrari (1995) claimed that procrastination has not been a focus of theoretical and empirical inquiry in the past, but lately has been

granted more credence as the causes and correlates of procrastination have gained interest (Ferrari, Johnson, & McCown, 1995).

Several empirical studies investigate procrastination and task-avoidance, usually with psychology undergraduates in the United States (Ferrari, 2000; Ferrari & Patel, 2004; Heimerdinger & Hinsz, 2008; Rabin et al., 2011; Strunk & Steele, 2011; Wolthers, 2003) and other countries such as Canada (Klassen et al., 2008), Finland (Nurmi et al., 2003), Korea (Seo, 2008), Singapore (Tan et al., 2008), and Switzerland (Schnell, Brandstatter, & Knopfel, 2010). Additionally, high school students in the U.S. (Madjar et al., 2011) and Iran (Nasiriyani et al., 2011) as well as work place employees (Ferrari & Diaz-Morales, 2007) have contributed to an understanding of this behavior.

In sum, most agree that self-efficacy is a predictor of procrastination and task-avoidance, but few have recognized the importance of creating educational experiences that build mastery experiences necessary for positive self-efficacy. Discussions regarding emotions of anxiety and neurosis were commonly tied to procrastination and task-avoidance; however, this aspect was not clearly linked to Bandura's source of self-efficacy, *physiological states*. The propensity to boredom and distractions associated with extraneous signals is also associated with procrastination/task-avoidance behaviors (Ferrari, 2000). Most often, the educational implications of these studies suggest the need to address measures that can improve planning activities, organizing tasks, managing time and setting goals.

Importantly, Schnelle, Brandstatter and Knopfel (2010) said, "people with few resources reported lower outcome expectancy and, in turn, adopted more avoidance goals" (p. 227), implicating the influence of low socioeconomic status, a characteristic of

underprepared students. Furthermore, Nurmi et al. (2003) concluded that an individual's response/approach to academic situations are cumulative, forming either positive or negative cycles; thus, the use of task-avoidance strategies predict poor academic performance and seem to lead to the continuing use of this particular strategy, creating a self-defeating mechanism. These findings, although somewhat vague, clearly point to the influence self-efficacy theory and the influence of cultural reproduction theory. Ferrari (1995), in contrast, points out that procrastination and task-avoidance have been attributed to time demands imposed by economic factors, social class, ethnicity and race, but evidence of these factors is not conclusive. The current research is focused on a distinct population, usually undergraduate students, thereby suggesting the need for additional research with students who are considered underprepared. However, understanding the correlates of procrastination and task-avoidance as provided by current empirical studies supports the theoretical frame I selected and the circumstances of my study. Specifically, teachers should pay particular attention to setting distal and proximal goals, organizing tasks, and assisting students with time-management to reverse the inclination to avoid failure. These instructional practices help to create successful academic outcomes and work concurrently towards reversing the effects of negative self-efficacy. This study will examine teacher experiences and how their English transition course development and instruction addressed students who demonstrate procrastination task-avoidance behaviors.

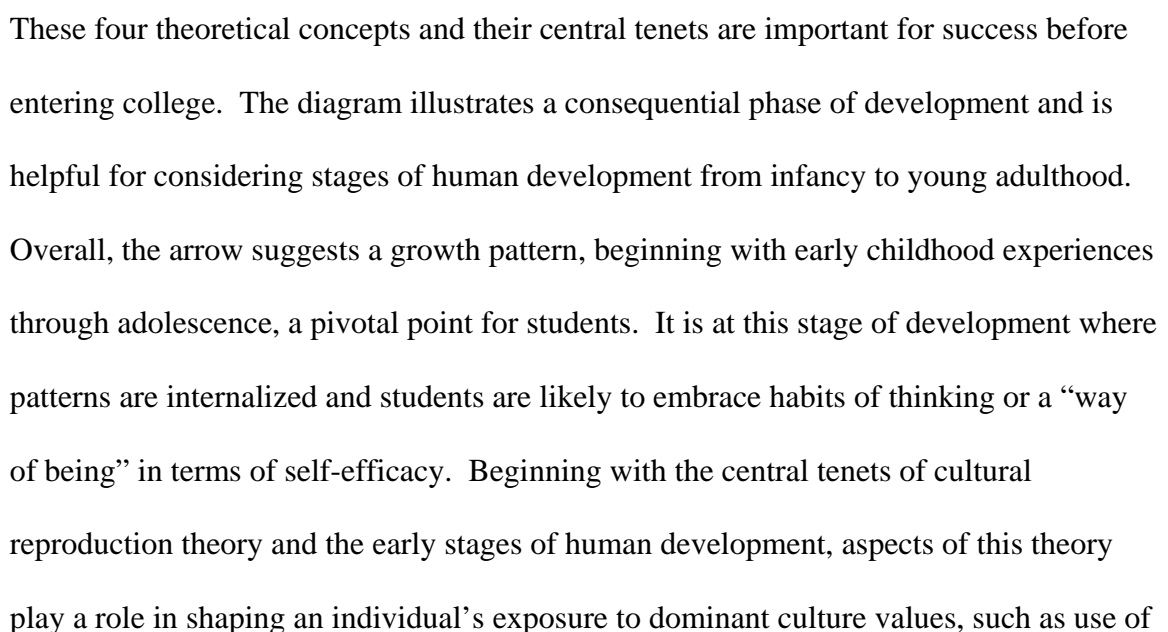
### **Summary**

All four theories—SCT, CRT, SET and PTAT—work together to form a strong theoretical frame for understanding underprepared, struggling students. Teachers who

create and teach an English transition course for at-risk students should demonstrate a practical understanding of these theoretical concepts and their application in the classroom. This study explored teacher experiences and sought to understand how these theories and their central tenets influence instructional decisions.

As one might expect, these theories converge and diverge in meaningful ways. For instance, SET is “a self-referent thought to mediate between knowledge and behavior” (Pajares & Johnson, 1993, p. 2). In other words, SET is a tool that individuals employ as a result of sociocultural experiences, whether conscious or unconscious, in order to bolster cognitive development. Vygotsky’s ZPD is an important concept related to student self-efficacy: learning tools and materials that do not sufficiently challenge and/or are beyond attainment negatively affect SET. For one to be successful, schooling must be structured in a way that is accessible and acceptable, offering many of the cultural tools needed to thrive in that realm even to those who are not privileged with models and financial means. This is where the role of the teacher is important. They should be sensitive to student backgrounds and design instruction that attends to the belief systems and practices students have developed over time. This study, which examined teacher experiences, sheds light on what it is like to design and teach a course to students who have internalized resistance to schooling, negative self-efficacy and poor academic performance and counterproductive academic dispositions. Thus, the central tenets of CRT, SCT and PAT help to explain a perpetual cycle of incongruence that continues to erode self-efficacy. In effect, the synthesis of these theories can explain individuals who attain academic achievement or in other cases work counterproductively, negating academic achievement.

## *The Relationship of Cultural Reproduction, Sociocultural, Self-efficacy and Procrastination-Task-avoidance Theories*



Standard English, role models (e.g., parent(s) possess a postsecondary degree), and engage in educational as well as performing arts experiences at an early age. If dominant culture values are a part of an individual's early and subsequent stages of development, this will reproduce success within an academic setting. If however, the central tenets of cultural reproduction are limited and/or do not exist for an individual during early stages of development, the individual will likely be disadvantaged in an academic setting. This is not to say that the aspects of this theory only apply to pre-school age children, but this is the time when it initially plays a role in development.

Cultural reproduction theory and sociocultural theory overlap in that culture plays a significant role in academic success and that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions with family and peers. The intersection of these theories is represented by schooling at an early age, when students begin to interact with peers and teachers. Sociocultural theory recognizes the influence of family and culture on academic success, but is primarily concerned with academic environments where learning is student centered and appropriately challenging. Thus, its central tenets are applicable to school-age children where the zone of proximal development is an important factor. If students do not receive instruction that moves them toward independence and mastery, students begin to internalize negative concepts about their ability. Consequently, negative concepts result in lower self-efficacy, the manifested outcome of negative cycles associated with the influences of cultural reproduction and sociocultural theories.

The point at which these theories overlap and intersect with self-efficacy indicates where students have internalized either negative or positive effects of reproduction and sociocultural experiences, establishing a belief system about their individual capabilities.

If these variables remain uncontrolled and the student continues to experience low academic achievement, low self-efficacy will contribute to a continuing cycle of poor performance and eventually result in other behaviors that perpetuate its existence, namely procrastination and task-avoidance. These behaviors may manifest in early adolescence and continue through adulthood, as the arrow in Figure 2.1 suggests. The teachers of developmental and transition courses face students who have a history of low self-efficacy and poor academic dispositions; they must work to reverse habits of thinking and help students overcome the accumulation of years of negative influences—a challenging task, indeed. The diagram illustrates the influences of theory and resultant behaviors that occur well before students enter postsecondary institutions and high school settings; however, measures can be taken to reverse these effects.

Although these theories provide a frame for understanding underprepared students, it is unclear how each informs an understanding of teacher experiences as they relate to this study, which seeks to describe the essence of creating and teaching an ET course. Thus, the theoretical frame, as presented, is ambiguous and it remains unclear how each perspective will interact with this descriptive study. As a teacher, when I create courses, I consider students' self-efficacy, and although the transition to consider teacher self-efficacy seems like a peculiar juxtaposition, I do suggest it as the basis for this investigation. Moreover, I avoid making any additional theoretical claims or creating a mental organization of teacher experiences to preserve an objective stance, protecting my efforts to suspend any preconceived notions concerning the phenomenon, a fundamental dimension of phenomenological research (Conklin, 2005; Finlay, 2008; Finlay, 2009; Husserl, 1913/1982; Qin, 2013). Husserl (1913/1982) said:



But much depends on all of our essential determinations being understood in the correct sense. In them, let it be sharply emphasized, we were not arguing from pre-given philosophical standpoints; nor did we use traditional philosophical doctrines, not even those which may be universally acknowledged. Instead, we carried out some *essentially necessary clarifications* in the strictest sense, i.e., we only gave faithful expression to <eidetic> differences that are directly given to us in *intuitions*. We took the differences precisely as they are given in intuition, without any hypothetical or interpretive explication, without reading into them anything which may be suggested to us by traditional theories of ancient or modern times. (p. 33)

Scholars agree a “phenomenological attitude” is difficult to achieve (Conklin, 2005; Finlay, 2008) and the extent to which researcher predispositions/subjectivity is managed or necessarily addressed within a given inquiry is debatable (Finlay, 2009).

### **Review of Literature**

The literature review is comprised of six sections: (a) educational reform and its influence on college readiness, (b) postsecondary developmental education courses; successes and failures, (c) summer bridge programs for college readiness, (d) high school senior year transition programs for college readiness, (e) professional learning communities, and (f) a summary.

#### **Educational Reform and its Influence on College Readiness**

Several legislative acts have influenced educational practices in the state of Kentucky since The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA, 1990). Also known as House Bill 940, this comprehensive education reform initiative has played a major role in

the development of state and national attempts to improve education. Since its enactment in 1990, various amendments and adjustments to funding, taxes, teacher compensation, testing, bullying and religion, to name a few, have occurred. The 1997 Higher Education Bill, which restructured the governance and control of community colleges, significantly affected developmental (college/career readiness) education. The passing of this Act, specifically in Kentucky, created a new two-year Community and Technical College System, thereby committing more dollars for state colleges and universities to pursue a new state agenda for higher education that includes increased access (Leslie & Novak, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) provided additional opportunities to address the widening achievement gap of our nation's youth as well as further adjustments to Kentucky's educational policies. NCLB (2001) sought to improve educational opportunities for all children, regardless of race, income, geographic region, or other factors. Ultimately, the goal is that high school graduates are prepared for college and workforce demands. It pushed for rigorous common core standards, required greater accountability at all schools and levels of education, and provided support for low-achieving schools, all of which was intended to improve learning and graduation rates for Americans who were being outperformed by students from other countries.

The past twenty years of scrutiny have culminated in Kentucky's most recent sweeping comprehensive educational reform measure, Senate Bill 1 (SB1, 2009). As a result, Kentucky adopted the Common Core State Standards (2010) to prepare America's students for College and Career: The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards,

which articulate expectations for academic success from kindergarten to the postsecondary level in English language arts, and mathematics, were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce.

(<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards>).

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) defines college readiness as “the level of preparation a student entering college needs in order to be successful in credit-bearing courses at a level that will ensure their continued success in college –without the need for remediation” ([www.teachersdomain.org](http://www.teachersdomain.org)).

Senate Bill 1(2009) currently named Unbridled Learning, calls for alignment of college readiness standards across the continuum of grade levels, primary through postsecondary or grade 16. In addition, SB1 emphasizes the need for transition courses and summer bridge programs to reduce the need for postsecondary developmental courses. Some universities across the state have formed partnerships with local schools to create mathematics and literacy transition courses for high school seniors. Where partnerships do not exist, KDE has also provided a model for transition courses as another option to meet college readiness goals. Few Summer Bridge Programs (SBPs) that focus on unmet college readiness benchmarks are reported on. In addition, online, accelerated SBPs have been proposed, but their development, implementation and results are unclear.

Alongside the initiatives provided by government agencies and educational entities, the business sector is providing additional alternatives. On October 13, 2010, “Blackboard announced they will work with “a for profit education provider, K12 INC.,

to sell online courses to colleges that want to outsource their remedial offerings” (<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/>). This announcement spawned debate and reaction among developmental education instructors. The creation of online and accelerated courses is somewhat contentious and some educators speculate whether the intent to provide online, accelerated learning opportunities is appropriate, due to the deficiencies in technology literacy, reading skills, organization and study skills, feelings of detachment from the educational system and lack of self-efficacy that many developmental students encounter. Clearly, it is a time of change with multiple avenues for improving college and career readiness among the nation’s youth being considered; however, the most common form of intervention is still developmental education courses at the postsecondary level, which cover mathematics, reading and English.

### **Postsecondary Developmental Education Courses: Successes and Failures**

At present, developmental education is under considerable scrutiny and one of the most difficult issues for community colleges and four-year institutions (Bailey et al., 2010; Bailey, 2009; Foote, 1998; Grubb & Cox, 2005; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Parsad & Lewis, 2004). In fact, several agencies, such as The Lumina Foundation (Achieving the Dream), The U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are funding initiatives and research to improve college readiness programs/courses (Bailey, 2009). Additionally, there has been a push to shift remedial coursework from four-year institutions to community colleges and some states have passed legislation to set limits on funding for developmental coursework (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Parsad & Lewis, 2004).

A large proportion of students who enter college (40%) are required to take at least one developmental course (Attewell et al., 2006), usually mathematics (Attewell et al., 2006; Bailey, 2009; Garcia, 2011; Prince, 2010). However, many students are required to take multiple developmental courses, sometimes sequences of coursework that include mathematics, English and reading. According to Jagers and Hodora (2011), “students referred to lower levels of developmental education are much less likely to successfully exit the developmental sequence, and among those who do, the sequence can take months or even years to complete” (p. 41). Overall, more students who are referred to developmental reading courses complete their sequences of courses over writing and mathematics (Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Bonham & Boylan, 2011); however, the need for remediation in reading reduces one’s chances of completing a degree (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Oudenhoven, 2002).

The reviews of developmental coursework and course sequences offered at various institutions are mixed and often their methodologies are not considered sound (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Melguizo, Bos, & Prather, 2011; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Although completion rates, retention rates and graduation rates for students who enroll in developmental courses are overall quite low (Jones et al., 2011; Hoyt, 1999; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000), value is attributed to the skills students obtain in developmental reading, writing and mathematics coursework (Bailey et al., 2010). Additionally, without the courses more students would likely drop out of college and become less likely to complete their degree (Bettinger & Long, 2008; Boylan, 1999; Weissman, Silk, & Bulakowski, 1997). The exception is if students require remediation in all three areas, in which case the likelihood of dropping out increases (Hoyt, 1999; Oudenhoven, 2002). It

is clear that measuring student success rates is a difficult task, as institutions show variability in assessment measures and student success is confounded by student interest and ability (Bettinger & Long, 2008; Hoyt, 1999; Meristotis & Phipps, 2000; Oudenhoven, 2000).

Weissman, Bulakowski and Silk (1997) outline four measures for assessing the effectiveness of developmental coursework: (a) developmental education course completion rate, (b) student movement from developmental education courses to college-level courses, (c) successful completion of college-level coursework, and (d) student persistence/retention. Another measure is the graduation rates of students who require remediation. The Complete College America report (Jones et al., 2011) found that of students who attend two-year colleges, 62% complete remediation and 9.5% are projected to graduate within three years. Additionally, of students who attend four-year colleges, 74.4% complete remediation and 35.1% are projected to graduate within six years (p. 10). In addition, of the 33 states who participated in the CCA study, the entry cohort of Kentucky in 2004, 5.5% of students received an associate's degree in three years. Louisiana's success rate was lowest at 2.7% and Missouri ranked highest at 23.3%. The report described similar developmental course completion and college course completion rates in Kentucky for English and mathematics; however, reading developmental course completion rates were not included.

Goldrick-Rab (2010) asserted that developmental education requires consistent review, ongoing evaluation and a multifaceted approach, including summer bridge programs, and much of the evidence on potential reforms is new and scarce. Importantly,

authors agree that remediation can begin in the high school setting (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

### **Summer Bridge Programs for College Readiness**

Summer bridge programs (SBPs) are not a new concept, so the purpose of this literature review is to examine SBPs specifically designed to promote college readiness in reading and writing. SBPs are usually considered as accelerated learning situations and, according to recent trends in accelerated learning, may provide opportunities for online delivery methods.

Overall, four categories emerged from the literature collection: (a) bridge program bibliographies, non-empirical overviews and/or program advocacies/proposals, (b) bridge programs for high-performing students, (c) bridge programs for low-income, minority and other disadvantaged groups, and (d) bridge programs and content area. The latter two categories overlap, as the program designed to meet a specified content area was also designed for a minority group (Morrow & Morrow, 1992).

The first category, bridge program bibliographies, non-empirical overviews/proposals, was useful in providing additional articles for review; however, their contents did not contribute to the overall goals of my review. The second category, bridge programs for high-performing students, did not address the needs of students who have academic or “college readiness” needs. These articles examined “residential” SBPs designed to acclimate students with high academic performance, specifically in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines. These SBPs ranged in duration—four weeks, six weeks, five weeks and 10 weeks.

Based on the evidence of summer bridge programs over the past 30 years, it is important to note that, of the 12 empirical studies examined, none of them utilized an online design, but this is likely attributed to emerging and/or lack of technology. They all were “residential programs” where students were immersed in the college community and the courses most often addressed multiple content areas as well as personal and social development. Most of the studies employed quantitative methodologies, usually descriptive in nature. One study provided inferential analyses (Suhr, 1980) while two articles described pre/posttest designs (Ami, 2001; Risku, 2002). One study focused on a qualitative design, examining student attitudes toward mathematics (Morrow & Morrow, 1992) and two displayed a mixed methodology approach (Buck, 1985; Santa Rita & Bocote, 1996). Qualitative data consisted of student testimonials. The number of participants ranged from 28-574. The study with the greatest number of participants was a longitudinal study collecting yearly data from 1978-1984 (Buck, 1985). Risku (2002) examined summer sessions that ran between 1995-1999; however, no details were provided. Increasing the number of studies that report outcomes over a number of years would be helpful in establishing true gains, whether in attitude or achievement.

For most of the studies (Suhr, 1980; Buck, 1985; Santa Rita & Bocote, 1996; Risku, 2002), the focus was either student persistence, or student retention rates and graduation. Only one focused on achievement/college readiness objectives (Ami, 2001). Three articles stated a theoretical perspective that informed their research: Tinto’s (1975) Social Integration Theory (Buck, 1985; Moore et al., 2007) and Feminist Framework, (Morrow & Morrow, 1992). Moore et al. (2007) explained, “Tinto’s (1975) Social Integration Theory and Bean’s (1980) Student Attrition Model are most commonly cited



as the theoretical basis for the development of these programs”; and further that, “In these models, positive experiences with the university and academic preparation prior to beginning the freshman year have positive influences on retention and attitudes” (p. 2).

Four programs were “residential,” requiring that students live on college campuses for the duration of the summer bridge program (Suhr, 1980; Buck, 1985; Morrow & Morrow, 1992; Risku, 2002). Three described “on-campus” programs where students commuted to campus (Ami, 2001; Santa Rita & Bacote, 1996) and another article indicated that students were bused to campus (Moore et al., 2007). This program was designed to introduce students to the college campus earlier in their high school careers. The duration of SPBs was either four or six weeks. All were multidisciplinary with the exception of Ami (2001), which focused on mathematics. Programs also addressed time management skills, cultural events, building self-esteem, and confidence with technology. Each program also expressed the importance of developing a “sense of community” with participants.

Suhr (1980) concluded that females were more likely to participate when programs were offered on a voluntary basis and questioned whether a four-week SBP was sufficient to meet objectives. Two researchers commented on the expense and time needed to develop good programs (Risku, 2002; Suhr, 1980). Most indicated evidence of improved attitudes, as well as improved retention and persistence rates; however, one study stated that there was no difference in graduation rates between SBP participants and the majority of students (Risku, 2002). The most significant results in terms of students’ achievement were reported in an accelerated mathematics course (Ami, 2001). Sixty-four percent showed improved algebra scores and 43% improved their mathematics

placement—in other words, they did not have to enroll in developmental mathematics courses.

I conclude that the research base does not provide an adequate supply of studies that address college readiness. Some examine attitudinal measures and others examine persistency rates beyond the first year of postsecondary coursework. Although these are important topics of concern, their focus does not address the need to reduce remediation rates at the postsecondary level. SBPs designed specifically for students who have demonstrated “college readiness” needs in content areas are underreported and apparently not the intended focus of programs that are currently in place. Admittedly, SBPs for college readiness in content areas may be in place, but outcomes are only reported internally (i.e., within the institutions or schools where they are developed).

Additionally, no studies address online summer bridge programs. This is a relatively new area of SBP design and facilitators may need more time to develop and implement such programs. Although controversy does exist about the efficacy of online, accelerated developmental SBPs, these types of programs need to be developed and examined in order to contribute to the knowledge base (Appendix A).

### **High School Senior-Year Transition Programs for College Readiness**

Transition courses, in the contemporary sense, are a relatively new enterprise, created to assist students entering postsecondary education; thus, there is little empirical evidence to discuss in this area. However, some important distinctions can be made within the literature base. First, some descriptions of transition courses and their outcomes are often Summer Bridge Programs, the term most commonly used to describe residential and non-residential programs that are provided to high school graduates before

entering postsecondary education. Additionally, transition programs sometimes refer to initiatives that provide assistance with admissions, scholarships and other financial needs for students entering college. In light of current educational reforms, transition courses are those typically designed for and offered to high school seniors, targeting at-risk students to reduce the need for remediation in specific content areas, such as mathematics, reading and English.

Mathematics transition programs were most often reported (Frost, Coomes & Lindeblad, 2009; Luna & Fowler, 2011; White, Porter, Gamoran, & Smithson, 1997). However, their curricula were designed for multiple grade levels, 7-12, and program details were sketchy. Frost et al. (2009) reported the outcomes of professional development collaboration among postsecondary and high school faculty, but did not specifically address a senior-year mathematics transition course designed to reduce remediation.

Alternatively, Barger et al. (2011) outlined the progress that five states (Florida, Kentucky, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia) have made toward their stated college and career readiness action agenda, specifically the design and delivery of transitional courses in reading, writing and mathematics for high school seniors who have not met college readiness benchmarks. Overall, the transition courses are at different stages of development and delivery, and are the result of work done by respective state Department of Education personnel. The courses vary in structure, are designed as online modules or units, and in some cases can be taught face-to-face. At this time, there is no evidence indicating the success rate of these courses.

There have been no studies to date similar to the school-university partnership described in this study where university faculty collaborate with local high school teachers regularly to develop an English transition course to reduce the need for remediation in English and reading. This collaborative effort is an alternative to the Department of Education programs mentioned previously, in that university faculty and high school faculty work to develop a stand-alone class. Most schools involved in this project offer the course as a full-year, for-credit English course, although some are partial-year credit courses. This point serves as another distinction between transition courses: those developed by state agencies seem to be in contrast to those that are more localized and developed through direct collaborations between secondary and postsecondary faculty.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

The conceptualization of professional learning communities (PLCs), a form of professional development, has a long history. PLC constructs/definitions vary and modified approaches are present in light of technological applications as well as differing iterations/applications outside of the recommended school setting. Although touted as a viable means of improving student achievement, PLCs are difficult to initiate (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord & Tobia, 2012; Richmond & Manokore, 2010) and sustain (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Additionally, they require strong support/leadership (Al-Taneiji, 2010; Bezzina, 2006; Garrett, 2010; Graham, 2007; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Nelson, 2008; Schmoker, 2005) and more

studies are needed to support their effectiveness (Hord, 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Nelson, 2008; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008).

To begin, authors suggest that the concept of PLCs emerged from multiple individuals (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Williams, 2013; Wood, 2007) dating back to the 1970s (Hord & Tobia, 2012; McLester, 2012), but its roots are traced to the business sector, beginning with Follett (1924), whose interests consisted of workplace relations (Williams, 2013; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004) and the ideas of Dewey (Stoll et al., 2006; Wood, 2007; Kaplan, 2008). For expediency, my review focuses on contemporary explanations of PLCs and notable individuals associated with modern concepts. The current conception of PLCs, as a working model for schools to implement, is the result of over twenty years of development and evolution, often attributed to the work of Peter Senge (1990), Richard DuFour (1998) and Shirley Hord (2008).

Multiple authors reference the seminal work of Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Learning Organizations* (1990). As previously noted, the influence of the business sector has helped to shape educational practitioners' and researchers' understanding of PLCs. Senge (1990) proclaims that five components are necessary to cultivate a collaborative culture: (a) *systems thinking* (seeing the big picture), (b) *personal mastery* (commitment to lifelong learning), (c) *mental models* (introspection/reflection and sharing with others), (d) *building shared vision* (individuals agree on goals and their picture of the future), and (e) *team learning* (dialogue and thinking together). These "learning organization" constructs inform the development of DuFour's depiction of Professional Learning Communities.

Dufour and Eaker (1998) claimed that “a clear vision of what a learning community looks like and how people operate within it will offer insight into the steps that must be taken to transform a school into a learning community” (p. 25) and outlined the following characteristics: (a) shared mission vision and values, (b) collective inquiry, (c) collaborative teams with a common purpose, (d) action orientation and experimentation, (e) continuous improvement, and (f) results orientation (ongoing assessments).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) distinguish between “organization” and “community,” saying, “while the term *organization* suggests a partnership enhanced by efficiency, expediency, and mutual interests, *community* places greater emphasis on relationships, shared ideals, and strong culture—all factors that are critical to school improvement” (p. 15). Furthermore, *professional* denotes “someone with expertise in a specialized field” and “learning suggests ongoing action and perpetual curiosity” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. xi-xii). Later, DuFour (2005) captured the essentials of a PLC in four “big ideas”: (a) ensuring students learn, (b) a culture of collaboration, (c) a focus on results and, (d) hard work and commitment.

Hord and Sommers (2008) characterized the components of a PLC as: (a) shared beliefs, values and vision, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) collective learning and its application, (d) supportive conditions and, (e) shared personal practice. Although authors define and characterize PLCs in various ways, each suggests the importance of building trust among members, devoting enough time to cultivate a collaborative culture and having school leaders who are supportive over the long-term. Additionally, schools may claim that PLCs are a part of operating procedures, when in fact this may not be the

case, either by a desire to present a collaborative culture because PLCs are viewed as an attribute, or because the PLC concept is not fully understood. Hord and Sommers (2008) noted that “the specificity of just what constitutes a PLC has yet to be communicated among many educators” (p. 8). Bear in mind, many have weighed in on the importance and current understanding of PLCs, including but not limited to, Andy Hargreaves, Kristine Hipp, Louise Stoll, Mike Schmoker and Timothy Kanold. Although the aim of PLCs is student achievement, there is little evidence to show this outcome; most often, studies examine the perception and/or presence of PLCs within a given setting.

Currently, new iterations of the PLC are appearing because of technological advancements. “Professional Learning Networks (PLNs)” and “Professional Online Communities,” although not explicitly grounded within the PLC model, do offer alternatives that incorporate teacher collaboration and learning to improve student achievement (Duncan-Howell, 2010; Flanigan, 2011; Wiesenbergs & Willment, 2002). These online programs, recognizing that teachers are inadequately served by professional development (PD) programs and are not provided with the time or means for ongoing collaborations within schools, offer active learning environments with opportunities for reflection, peer support and inquiry (Duncan-Howell, 2010). These aspects of PLNs share features of a PLC and differ from the traditional PD programs and workshops that teachers routinely attend. Sawchuk and Keller (2010) went so far to say, “no other aspect of the teacher-quality system in the United States suffers from an identity crisis as severe as that of professional development” (p. 2). That said, given the conditions and environment necessary to develop a PLC in the traditional sense, online communities are on the rise. Most importantly, the project associated with this inquiry incorporated both

delivery methods, a face-to-face community, and an online community (*Transition Literacy Learning Community, TLLC*). The latter, which was developed using Blackboard and offered only to program participants via a password-protected system, served as a means of communication as well as a repository of information that informed the development and assessment practices of a English Transition course.

A number of theoretical and putative journal publications appear within the literature base, in addition to those that are empirical in nature. Interestingly, PLCs are of global interest, with studies occurring in multiple countries; however, replication is difficult to achieve, as there is not a set pattern of implementation and PLCs are often considered non-linear (Graham, 2007; Servage, 2007, 2008; Sigurdardottir, 2010).

My review examined studies conducted in the United States (Buffum & Hinman, 2006; Doolittle et al., 2008; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Graham, 2007; Hipp et al., 2008; Linder, Post & Calabrese, 2012; Lujan & Day, 2010; Nelson, 2008; Richmond & Manokore, 2010; Thompson et al., 2004; Williams, 2013; Wood, 2007) and other countries (Al-Taneiji, 2010; Bezzina, 2006; Kristmanson, Lafargue & Culligan, 2011; Sigurdardottir, 2010; Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hamalainen & Poikonen, 2009). Several studies were qualitative (Bezzina, 2006; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Hipp et al., 2008; Lujan & Day, 2010; Nelson, 2008; Kristmanson et al., 2011; Richmond & Manokore, 2010; Webb et al., 2009; Wood, 2007) and others utilized mixed methods (Al-Taneiji, 2010; Linder et al., 2012; Parry, 2007; Sigurdardottir, 2010; Thompson et al., 2004; Williams, 2013). While four publications suggested a research methodology (Borrero, 2010; Buffum & Hinman, 2006; Bullough & Bough, 2008; Doolittle et al., 2008), these reports were largely descriptive.



Two separate studies utilized surveys that measured study participant perceptions: One by Thompson et al. (2004)—the Learning Organization Practices Profile by O’Brien (1994), which was based on Senge’s five disciplines of a learning organization—and the other by Al-Taneiji (2010), the Professional Learning Community Assessment Instrument by Huffman and Hipp (2003). Another survey measured the presence of PLC activities, the Teacher Activity Survey by Garet et al., (1999) and used by Graham (2007). Others utilized surveys that were self-created (Linder et al., 2012; Sigurdardottir, 2010). A modicum of studies analyzed the relationship between a PLC and student achievement, mathematics (*Standardized Residual for Icelandic and Mathematics*) and reading (*Texas Education Agency assessment for Reading, TAKS*), respectively (Sigurdardottir, 2010; Williams, 2013). Because this study involves a school-university partnership, I share findings based on the following distinction: settings involving “in-school” PLCs followed by settings where PLCs are between institutions.

In-school PLC studies were most often grounded in the theoretical and conceptual frames of DuFour and Hord. Other foundational concepts, including, Fullan, Schulman, Cochran, Lieberman and Spillane, informed this research. Studies spanned all grade levels, elementary through high school, and usually conformed to a case study design. Overall, the studies suggested several strengths associated with PLCs. Most often, PLCs are viewed as an opportunity to learn from other teachers and have a positive effect on colleagues—building trust and collegiality, advancing teachers’ identity as change agents and creating a supportive environment. Teachers also recognized the positive impact PLCs have on student learning and how data are understood to improve teaching practices. Researchers agreed that PLCs are complex and difficult to initiate as well as

sustain, requiring fundamental and ongoing leadership. In fact, PLCs exhibit “starts,” “fits,” and sometimes “stalls.” It takes considerable time to build a culture of collaboration, especially if there is not strong support from school principals or if district policies interfere. Collaborations among teachers are not always ideal and often discussions do not go beyond a superficial level. The terms “mature” and “immature” help characterize the disposition of PLCs and several factors must work together to form a mature PLC: support, leadership, commitment, shared vision, willingness to take risks, ability to handle conflict, ability to overcome external obstacles, deep dialogue, ample time and regular meetings. Studies suggested that successful PLCs are more effective than traditional PD, but require strong leadership from school principals, challenging their traditional or perceived role. Most importantly, it seems that creating shared leadership, developing a process for dealing with conflicts, and instructing teachers on how to collaborate are critical measures to consider early in the PLC formation process.

Very few empirical studies addressed school-university partnerships using PLCs (Kristmanson et al., 2011; Linder et al., 2012), though in some cases it is simply difficult to determine a research methodology, which usually took the form of a descriptive report (Borrero, 2010; Bullough & Baugh, 2008; Doolittle et al., 2008). Multiple theoretical perspectives framed each inquiry, thus the studies and explanations were not linked to a particular model or conception of a PLC. Overall, studies emphasized that PLCs are challenging and labor intensive. Most importantly, discussions centered on pedagogical and empirical literature helped build a shared language that fostered productive communications.

In sum, the terms “culture” and “reculturing” appear often within the literature base—fundamental tenets of what it means to create and sustain a PLC. Additionally, authors comment on the paradoxes associated with PLCs; relatedly, the term “isolation” is frequently referenced. Counterintuitively, standardization and centralization of curriculum negatively affects the ability of schools to create and sustain PLCs. O’Keefe (2012) criticizing the PLC concept, noted that teacher isolation is a critical safeguard and said, “I dislike PLCs penchant for groupthink, its “change-process” fetish, and its insinuation that individual teachers, under reasonable supervision, can’t be trusted to do the right thing...teacher autonomy—or if you insist, teacher isolation—is a critical safeguard against bad ideology” (p. 58).

To be clear, most studies do not address the relationship between PLCs and student success. When it does occur, readers are advised to view the results with caution, as it is difficult to substantiate that the PLC directly influenced student achievement. However, it is agreed that PLCs can improve teacher morale, motivation, enthusiasm, self-efficacy and instruction, which in the end can improve student learning.

Overall, the implementation of PLCs is suggested to occur within a distinct school setting; however, its application is also relevant within/across school districts and between institutions. The PLC used in this study girds the school-University partnership, contributing to a literature base that is anemic in terms of empirical evidence. This study does not focus on student achievement; however, pre- and post exams scores were collected for reading comprehension and on-demand writing exams over a three-year period. The aim of this research is to describe the essence of high school teachers’ experiences planning and teaching a senior-year English Transition course designed to

achieve college readiness in reading and writing. Specifically, how do teachers experience planning as a result of collaborative sessions with University English faculty and how do teachers experience planning as result of their individual efforts?

### **Summary**

The English transition course reference herein, designed to reduce the need for remediation at the postsecondary level for reading and writing, serves as a call for further research to understand teachers and their experiences in creating and teaching such courses. As indicated by applicable theoretical perspectives and the current research, it takes considerable time to address this student population's unique set of challenges. The current trend to provide summer bridge programs that address multiple areas of student growth, within 4-8 weeks, limits the substance of instruction that addresses specific content deficiencies. Creating this course, a senior-year high school English transition course that provides the time necessary to prepare students for the rigors of college-level reading and writing and the need to understand teacher experiences about creating and teaching such a course, is a desirable research goal. We need to know how teachers are responding to initiatives intended to promote college readiness. A senior-year English transition course is one kind of intervention/initiative that warrants further examination.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Overview and Introduction**

This dissertation is a qualitative, phenomenological description of what it means to create and teach a high school English Transition (ET; ETC) course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing from the perspective of high school faculty during a climate of educational reform. Recent efforts to promote college readiness resulted in the development of the Common Core Standards (2010). These standards articulate expectations for academic success from kindergarten to the postsecondary level. The adopted Standards for Language Arts (2010) were integrated into the planning and development of the ET course; a period of uncertainty and caution surrounded this broad educational reform measure. Additionally, State mandates for reform such as Senate Bill 1(2009) led to partnerships between Universities and schools and consequently this research investigated high school faculty's views on collaborations with postsecondary English faculty over a three-year period (January 2010-May 2013).

Although there have been several studies that examine school-university partnerships, few if any have described perceptions of a senior-year transition course specifically designed for at-risk students in areas of reading and writing. By completing this study, teachers, administrators and policy makers may have a better understanding of the nature of this phenomenon. The methodology of the proposed study is articulated in the following subsections: (a) research questions, (b) research design, (c) researcher role, (d) participants, (e) research setting, (f) data sources, (g) data gathering, (h) data analysis, (i) data analysis conclusions, (j) trustworthiness of findings, and (k) summary.

## **Research Questions**

This research examined the following research questions as a result of an ongoing three-year pilot study between a four-year comprehensive University and 16 partnering high schools within an identifiable geographic region (Appendix B). The research questions are as follows: (a) What is the essence of high school teachers' experiences planning a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing? Specifically, how do teachers experience planning as a result of collaborative sessions with university English faculty? Additionally, how do teachers experience planning (e.g., course goals, units of study, individual lessons) as result of their individual efforts? (b) What is the essential experience of teaching a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing?

## **Research Design**

This research is a descriptive study posited within the qualitative tradition. The particular genre of inquiry is *phenomenology*. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) identified two major purposes of qualitative research: “to *describe and explore* and to *describe and explain*” (p. 316). This study employed the latter, crystalizing the lived experiences of 10 high school faculty responsible for creating and teaching an English Transition course during a climate of educational reform.

Phenomenology is the best approach for this study, as others offer differing effects to research communities, readers and participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). That said, the goal of this study was to describe a particular phenomenon, experienced by several individuals, to deduce a common or unifying principle. I did not attempt to build theory (grounded theory) or to describe cultural values or ways of living

(ethnography); nor did a particular setting or curriculum (case study) bind participants. Phenomenology was the best approach for this study, providing a retrospective analysis guided by research questions that examined the lived experience of ETC teachers. The participants shared a similar experience, collaborating with University English faculty to develop an English Transition course and engaging in other acts of planning as well as teaching the course in their respective school. The phenomenon of interest was the planning and teaching of an ET course; therefore, a phenomenological approach was best suited to this study.

The phenomenological genre is rooted in the philosophical views of German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), “Husserl’s philosophy of phenomenology sought to define the ‘essence’ of the objects of our perceptions and that human consciousness orders the ways that we understand the physical nature of the world” (p. 33). This was the best design to answer the research questions, which focus on the essence of faculty experiences in relation to a particular phenomenon.

Creswell (2007) described two types of phenomenology, hermeneutic (Van Manen, 1990) and transcendental (Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (1990) said, “The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflective re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (p. 36). While Van Manen’s approach to phenomenology emphasized researcher interpretation of the meaning of lived experiences, Moustakas was interested more in the description that participants provide

of their experience. Meanwhile, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach is an extension of transcendental phenomenology. According to Van Manen (1990),

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a descriptive methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive methodology because it claims there are no such things as interpreted phenomena. (p. 180)

In other words, the experience or dialogue is a text, captured in language and interpreted with the intent to understand the author. In the traditional sense, Hermeneutic phenomenology examines the structure of written texts and the nature of interpretation (Ihde, 1971; Ricoeur, 1975). Because the research questions sought only to describe faculty experiences, this inquiry followed the transcendental phenomenological conceptual framework and methods provided by Moustakas (1994). I developed a “*textural description* of the experiences of the participants and a *structural* description of their experiences in terms of conditions, situations or contexts and combined both textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60) through participant interviews by following these processes: (a) *epoche*, (b) *phenomenological reduction*, (c) *imaginative variation* and (d) *synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions* (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 180-181).

### **Researcher’s Experiences and Biases**

Having taught developmental reading and writing courses at a four-year institution since 2004, I have witnessed firsthand the struggles underprepared students



face when entering the higher education arena. As an aside, a fair number of my students struggle with low SES; however, a number of affluent students are also evident, usually international students (ESL) who have come to the United States to receive college degrees. This latter group generally displays good reading and writing skills that parallel those of prepared students, but can also demonstrate errors that are typical of second language learners. Nevertheless, I sympathized with student frustrations, such as paying for college coursework that does not contribute to a program of study, and often questioned how these students could master the prerequisite reading and writing skills before leaving high school and bypass the need for remediation at the postsecondary level. Fortuitously, during the spring of 2009, the state legislature enacted Senate Bill 1, calling for a reduction in the number of students who enter higher education underprepared. The goal was to reduce remediation by 50% by 2014. This state's Council of Postsecondary Education President, in a letter to higher education faculty, said:

There is a significant need for relevant and focused research that will facilitate and enable our p-12 colleagues to make and sustain the changes needed to achieve the goals of Senate Bill 1, and you as postsecondary faculty are best positioned for this work (Appendix C).

His words captivated me: this was a timely opportunity to make a difference for students. Immediately, I began conversations with developmental course instructors, other English department faculty and administrators within the College of Education, inquiring about the possibility of creating a partnership with high schools. I encountered a favorable response and after several conversations, email exchanges, and preliminary meetings,

was encouraged to persist. An important gathering of key individuals from the University took place in November 2009. The group included College and Departmental administrators, the Office of Field Services Director and English faculty who had expressed their interest. Consequently, I created a Professional Education Fellow (PEF) proposal for the University's Office of Field Services (Appendix D), which was approved and from there a University-school partnership was formed.

Four faculty members from the English department comprised the team that would work with schools to create and implement an English Transition course for high school seniors. I found myself in a leadership role, securing Internal Review Board approval (Appendix E), securing access to schools, organizing PEF team meetings, seeking and securing both internal and external funds, as well as facilitating monthly meetings with designated ET course teachers. Driven by my passion to assist the underprepared, I assumed this leadership role and often felt uncertain as a junior faculty member and doctoral studies student still learning the ropes of achieving tenure, conducting research and advancing my understanding of literacy practices. Admittedly, the progress of a large-scale service project depended on the efforts of more than one individual and I must credit PEF team members and other University faculty for their expertise and assistance, but the trajectory and development was essentially a result of my own initiative.

That said, I have my own perceptions and views of what it means to collaborate with high school faculty, as well as postsecondary faculty to create an ET course and must consider the difficulties, as a qualitative researcher, of effectively detaching my

personal biases and perceptions from those I am studying. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) said:

Among the questions, one can ask are these: Can I manage an effective dialectic between what I personally feel as events happen around me and how I present my researcher face to others? Can I recognize and set aside any biases I have of the subject? Can I create a constructive interpersonal dynamic out of the apparent differences between me and the other? (p. 78)

Recognizing an ontological stance that reality is subjective and multiple (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), I understand the need for sensitivity regarding my own voice and the multiple voices I study. Moustakas' (1994) methods for conducting transcendental phenomenology research provide a mechanism for setting aside prejudgments (*epoche*) or "bracketing out one's own experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60); therefore, my role and potential bias is somewhat mediated for potential threats.

Epoche, bracketing or *Einklammerung* is the process of setting aside presuppositions, predictions or assumptions as an approach to inquiry, a stark contrast to the positivistic tradition (Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1967) said:

The ubiquitous detachment from and point of view regarding the objective world we term the *phenomenological epoche*. It is the methodology through which I come to understand myself as that ego and life of consciousness in which and through which the entire objective world exists for me, and is for me precisely as it is. (p. 8)

Authors agree this is a difficult task with some claiming it impossible, but nonetheless it serves as a guiding principle in the transcendental phenomenological approach. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to this process as bracketing throughout this study.

### **Researcher Role**

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggested there are two broad ways to view the researcher's role: degree of participation and social function while stipulating various typologies. Schwartz and Schwartz's 1955 passive participant observer/active participant observer role and Gold's (1958) four "master roles" are recognized as traditional typologies, falling within the degree of participation view (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Anderson's (1987) depiction of researcher role considered depth of learning situations and formality; in addition, Snow and colleagues (1986) developed four functional roles that fit a particular field, both of which speak to the social function view (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Snow, Benford and Anderson (1986) argued that "derived roles yield some kinds of information but not others" (p. 404) and professed that "fieldworkers ought to give more attention to the field roles that await them or that are to be devised" (p. 404). Their typology, *controlled skeptic*, *ardent activist*, *buddy-research* and *credentialed expert*, assisted with refining researcher roles when utilizing multiple data sources and when an ethnological approach to research is desired; therefore, I base my researcher role upon the traditional, degree of participation context. I do not use the social function typologies to explain my role as a researcher because I do not seek to understand the culture of the study participants and do not share the same temporal space.

Although contemporary typologies offer convincing strategies for defining researcher role and implicate the influence of social function and flexibility, I found my

role(s) evolved within a traditional taxonomy. My roles were more traditional because I found my degree of participation varied during the time I spent with participants. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) extended Gold's 1958 classic typology that is found repeatedly, *complete participant*, *participant-as observer*, *observer-as-participant*, and *complete observers* (Gold, 1958; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Snow et al., 1986). Hence, my discussion synthesizes the ideas of Gold with McMillan and Schumacher's (2006) possible interactive research roles: *complete observer*, *full participant*, *participant observer*, *insider observer*, *interviewer* and *participant researcher* (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 345), and am able to clearly define my evolving roles for this research. Several possibilities could apply to a given study, but in my case, I functioned first as a participant researcher and later as an interviewer.

My role as *participant researcher* (McMillan & Shumacher, 2006) marked the initial period when the partnership with schools was established, followed by the time collaborating with teachers at monthly meetings over a two-year timespan. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) said, "Unlike the complete participant, the participant-as-observer does not operate as a member who is fully integrated into the routines and subjective realities of the group" (p. 147); this further defined my initial supportive role using Gold's typology, as I assisted teachers with the development of their ET courses. PEFs understood variability and encouraged each teacher/school to customize their course to meet their particular school/student needs; therefore, a prescribed curriculum was not the goal of our partnership. Monthly meetings with ETC teachers occurred on the University's campus or a neutral site; thus, PEF members were unfamiliar with the particular indigenous idiosyncrasies of multiple high school settings. Similar to the *participant researcher*,

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) note, “In the role of participant-as-observer, researchers enter a field setting with an openly acknowledged investigative purpose and in this process, researchers and group members negotiate a space to cohabit and a relational ethic” (pp. 147-148). At the onset, school administrators and teachers signed a Memorandum of Understanding that articulated collaborative and research objectives (Appendix F). During the initial two-year collaborative period, I was able to establish a rapport with participating teachers; however, relationships with participants have positive and negative repercussions. To illustrate, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) defined the role of *participant researcher*, where the researcher establishes a dual role for purpose of study and admit it is difficult to play a researcher and collaborator role simultaneously (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, my role evolved to that of interviewer who no longer collaborated with teachers at monthly meetings. As McMillan and Schumacher (2006) assert, “The interviewer role is typical for phenomenological studies where the researcher establishes a role with each person interviewed” (p. 345). Accordingly, during the last year of the three-year pilot project, I distanced myself from the operational and collaborative activities of the University-school partnership and focused on participant interviews. Prior to this time, it was agreed that another PEF would handle management duties and program directives, of which a list was provided and schools were notified.

Although I continued to collaborate with PEF team members concerning a variety of issues, my interactions with high school teachers were limited to email communications regarding quantitative data collection procedures (Nelson-Denny exam for reading comprehension and on-demand essay scores). This subsidiary position was

necessary for me to complete and defend my doctoral studies qualifying exam (April 2012), and became even more necessary for dissertation purposes (August 2012). This was an emotional time for me, as I dealt with competing responsibilities. Additionally, I felt my management style, level of commitment, and interest in the partnership differed from the PEF member who agreed to take on the leadership role.

### **Research Participants**

This research utilized *criterion* sampling methods, meaning all participants experienced the phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) said, “There is a much more narrow range of sampling strategies for phenomenological study. It is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 128). There were two phases used for sampling: (a) purposeful and (b) criterion.

The first phase employed purposeful sampling strategies. Initially, four schools were identified for participation by the University’s Office of Field services because of their location, willingness to participate and previous experience with the development of a mathematics transition course. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), “Most qualitative studies are guided by purposeful sampling” (p. 122); thus, the selection of these sites was logical because they were within close proximity of the University and perceived to be sites where pilot projects are feasible. Sites that joined the partnership after the initial year did so according to their own volition. Either a school representative contacted a PEF member or Department Chair stating their interest, which indicated their awareness of the partnership came by word-of-mouth or some other venue where college

readiness initiatives were discussed. This process resembled network or snowball sampling where “each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 321). These processes, purposeful and network, formed the initial pool of study sites. High school administrators selected ETC teachers based on their interest in the project and their perceived ability to develop a new course curriculum.

The second phase employed criterion sampling strategies where all ETC teachers and principals who agreed to participate met an additional condition: they must have taught an ET course or functioned as school principal during the first two years of the pilot program. Polkinghorne (2005) said, “Participants for a qualitative study are not selected because they fulfill the representative requirements of statistical inference but because they can provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation” (p. 139). Thus, 21 teachers from 16 separate high schools form the basis of this study, providing the initial pool of participants who met eligibility requirements. This is an adequate sample size for a phenomenological study. In fact, the recommended sample size for phenomenological studies can vary greatly (Creswell, 2007). Polkinghorne (1989), “recommends that researchers interview from 5-25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 61). For this study, ten teachers agreed to participate.

Researchers agree that careful consideration of participant anonymity is an important aspect of qualitative research (Guenther, 2009; Seidman, 2013; Tolich, 2004) and the decision to disclose or not disclose organizations and/or participants can influence the level of analytic rigor (Guenther, 2009). Importantly, researchers must



consider both “external confidentiality,” where the researcher promises not to identify participants in their final report, and “internal confidentiality,” which are measures the researcher takes to guard against research participants’ ability to identify each other in the final report (Tolich, 2004). Additionally, as Seidman (2013) noted, “a function of the interviewing process and its products should be to reveal the participant’s sense of self and worth” (p. 125). In all, I considered ethical research and confidentiality as well as the need to balance excessive candor and censorship.

Although concealing names of organizations and places is difficult (Guenther, 2009), I have chosen not to identify research sites by name. In addition, to protect participant privacy, I selected pseudonyms and provide descriptions of participants that are intended to avoid characterizations that could disclose their identity. I discussed the use of pseudonyms with participants at the time of consent and permitted each to select a pseudonym of their choice, if preferred. No one provided a personal pseudonym; thus, I chose relatively generic names that were gender neutral. Any inferences drawn about the relative age, gender or any other idiosyncrasies associated with a particular name should be ignored.

### **Participant Descriptions**

**Kelly.** Kelly articulated a sense of identity and sees herself/himself as an artist, a painter first then a writer. Family, and their recognition of Kelly’s creative abilities, formed this identity at an early age. Kelly said, “I think that was a big thing, I always painted and I always liked to write. I think they thought that was going to lead to something. In fact, that they believed that inspired me. I think they treated me like I was special sometimes; not weird special, but like you are going to do something special.”

Kelly was influenced by a low socioeconomic background and was inspired by her/his mother's desire/efforts to improve family circumstances. Kelly said, "My mother, she put herself through school and that was inspiring. Maybe that, the fact that she was able to do that and took care of us and at one point I remember we were doing pretty good and I liked that feeling and how she did all that so ...." In fact, Kelly is the first in the family to graduate from high school, eventually becoming a first-generation college graduate who worked several jobs while completing her/his degree. In high school, Kelly viewed herself/himself as an average student with little motivation to work hard, but while in high school, a teacher moved Kelly into an AP English class; the challenge provided Kelly more freedom to be creative and inspired her/him to work harder. Rethinking self-expectations, Kelly went to college, considered the realities of an artist's career path and searched for something more attainable/stable; however, creativity was still an important consideration, something teaching could provide. Working various jobs while going to college, Kelly eventually entered the teaching profession as a substitute teacher. Kelly considers herself/himself to be a new teacher after five years of teaching in current position. Kelly admitted being a better college student, relished the experiences of classes/teachers that were not "old school" and felt bolstered by encouragement from family, support of instructors and work experience. Kelly exuded an excitement about art, painting and the creative aspect of teaching English and literature.

**Pat.** Pat is a National Board Certified teacher, teaching multiple grades, 6-12, over an 11-year period. Pat described a blue-collar family structure, growing up in the upper Eastern part of the United States. Neither of Pat's parents attended college, but were well educated, hardworking, and held the expectation that Pat would go to college,

as she/he recalls, at a very early age. Pat said, “I could go to them for help for homework. I could go to mom for help with writing essays because she just got that in her regular schooling, even though she didn’t go to college.” Pat’s family valued education, provided encouragement as well as financial support, and had strong religious beliefs. Adding, “When I went to high school they invested thousands of dollars for me to go to private Catholic school. They instilled in me a work ethic and paid for my undergraduate degree.” Pat said, “We were sometimes living pay-check to pay-check, they trained me to go to college so I wouldn’t have to deal with some of those job issues. I had that desire not to live that way.” Several factors have influenced Pat’s career choice and experiences as a teacher as well as her/his perceptions of the profession. Pat described her/his educational experience as “old-school” and attributes her/his success with writing and teaching English to this educational background. Saying, “I was drilled in the “old school way,” grammar and writing were instilled in me at a young age.” In fact, this educational experience continues to shape her/his expectations for students and feels that kids should be challenged more. Pat’s Bible studies background/interests and the encouragement of her/his youth minister to pursue speaking and writing strengths led Pat to a teaching career and continue to shape her/his identity and approach to teaching. Pat also credits the close camaraderie of fellow undergraduate students with the decision to pursue teaching certification. Pat admitted, “I didn’t like teaching in my early years and never thought I would be in education, but now I don’t know what else I would do.”

**Jamie.** Jamie, a second-year teacher working through an alternative certification program at a nearby University, articulated a family that valued education. After first receiving a degree in Communications, then working with at-risk teens for a non-profit

organization and finding success and personal satisfaction, Jamie accepted an opening at the local high school. Jamie said, "I initially became interested in teaching because of the teenagers I worked with at the agency. I liked being able to influence them in making good decisions." Although, Jamie's family includes several teachers, she/he did not seek this route in the beginning, wanting to try something different. Some of Jamie's biggest influences came from family and previous teachers saying, "My immediate family always pushed me to excel academically, the expectation was that I would go to college." Adding, "My biggest influences were two excellent high school AP teachers. I can't pinpoint it exactly, but they brought something to the classroom that sparked my interest and had a big influence on my life." Jamie admitted that family conversations surrounding education established some prejudgments about the profession, specifically how frequently schools and students are stereotyped but said, "It doesn't always turn out the way you expect," adding, "I have a student now that I was warned about at the beginning of the year but is polite, respectful and participates in class." Jamie works in a relatively small school, the majority of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who receive little support, saying, "Because the area is so poverty ridden, we think they can't achieve more, because of the lack of parental involvement, trying to change that mindset and combat that here has been an issue. We have to overcome that barrier and find ways to motivate them." Additionally, "that has been a personal issue for me trying to find ways to motivate and not fall back on the crutch that they don't have parental support." Adding, "I don't know that I've made a conscious effort to help underprepared, but there is an interest, I see the need and try to address it." Jamie finds satisfaction where she/he can see her/his influence and help students overcome obstacles.

**Alex.** Alex is an experienced teacher having taught 27 years—19 years within a private, Catholic school setting and the remaining years in a public school setting. Alex articulated a traditional family structure that valued education, honesty and hard work, saying, “We had a traditional family, with structure, expectations; good values like honesty.” In fact, Alex had six siblings and all were supported to attend Catholic schools, further evidence of a parental commitment to education. Alex credited this educational experience, along with a natural interest in teaching, as an influential factor for entering the teaching profession to become the only teacher in her/his family among other professionals, adding, “I went to good schools and had good teachers and it was well-structured. I think this exposure developed my interest in teaching.” Alex considered her/his teaching experiences, recognizing strengths and shortcomings associated with the profession and a personal belief system about perceived limitations and her/his role as a teacher. Foremost, Alex’s experiences teaching in both private and public settings have been a source of gratitude and adjustment. Alex said, “Teaching in the Catholic school was my favorite teaching time, it was a really free environment, working with incredible people, the Sisters and volunteers and we were trusted to come up with lessons on our own. It was a strong educational model for freedom in the classroom.” Adding, “public school is more bureaucratic, too test performance oriented, even though we do really well here, I struggled with that shift.” Alex submitted that teaching is stymied by standardization, saying, “The standards are all common sense, it requires a lot of paperwork that takes away from planning” and that standardized assessments “limit student learning and creativity.” Alex recognized the fluctuations associated with teaching year-to-year and class-to class and said, “teaching, is very physical” requires

“balancing personalities” and “it is important to set boundaries; professional interactions with students and tempering the infiltration of teaching responsibilities upon home life.” Foremost, Alex’s satisfaction comes from “teaching the kids that don’t realize their potential. I like to set them up for success early and build trust. I think the kids where you see your influence, is the most rewarding.” She/he views her/his role as someone who builds a nurturing, positive, safe environment. See Alex’s image (Appendix G).

**Lee.** Lee is an experienced teacher, having taught 12 years in the same high school that she/he attended. Additionally, Lee is an Advanced Placement Exam consultant, teaches introductory-level English courses part-time for a local University and Community College and provides tutoring for a University writing center. Lee admitted wading through elementary, middle school and high school experiences, but found tremendous success with both undergraduate and graduate studies, receiving writing awards and multiple degrees. Lee associated her/his early academic struggles with environmental, developmental, and interest factors, saying, “I went to a tough elementary school with very mean women, almost like nuns. It was hard for me to feel that harshness in school.” Adding that middle school was a difficult time, dealing with physical changes and not to mention “high school bored me. I wouldn’t take any AP classes and was horrible at mathematics.” Adding, “I was supposed to take AP English, but took choir instead, I liked choir better than anything in high school.” Lee admitted that a nurturing environment was more conducive to her/his success: “I was behind when I went to college and needed the basics to start off. I had to study and it was tough, I had been on academic vacation for such a long time.” Foremost, Lee credits family influences, her/his natural aptitude for English, literature and music as well as the

influence of postsecondary instructors, for her/his decision to enter the teaching profession. Lee said, "I always liked our family discussions about literature, psychology and my Dad promoted a love of liberal arts." Lee credits her/his Mother, Grandfather and respected Uncle for their "intellect, linguistic skill, and love of learning." Adding, "My professor was passionate about English, very free thinking and free speaking. I really liked that and think it was a motivator." Lee admitted her/his instructional style is more democratic and has a difficult time with some students who require a dictator style of interaction to be productive. Adding, "teaching remains a learning experience" and "balancing act," not just with instruction but also managing personalities. Lee confessed that standardization and state policies have a negative impact on her/his classroom, claiming that they are "more about paperwork than teaching" and feeling that, "posting 'I can' statements is insulting to my intelligence and to theirs at this level, but it is a constant worry." Lee viewed herself/himself as a lecturer and supplements instruction with a wide array of visual resources to stimulate student interest and engagement. See Lee's image (Appendix H).

**Taylor.** Taylor considered herself/himself a new teacher. Having had a variety of experiences first as an elementary substitute and mathematics coach, and briefly substituting in middle school, the shift to teaching high school students is a recent experience. Importantly, Taylor was asked to train employees in other professional experiences and said, "They asked me to train new employees just after starting while others had been there longer than me" and although she/he admits never knowing why, I imagine it is Taylor's appeal as a strong individual with high standards. Taylor articulated a family structure that was supportive and valued learning. Her/his mother, a

retired elementary school teacher, was particularly influential in identifying aptitudes and interests, saying early on that Taylor should “either be in the theatre or in the classroom” as well as instilling a strong belief system about learning. Specifically, Taylor’s mom instilled the notion that teaching a subject/topic forces learning to occur. According to Taylor, “Her favorite thing to tell me when we were learning something is ‘the best way to learn is to teach it to someone else,’ and since I was tiny I can remember her telling me that. The summer before my fifth grade year, before joining the band and learning to play the flute, she insisted that she learned to play it first, so that she could help me.” Poignantly, Taylor struggled to find this same enthusiasm for learning from others, saying, “I find myself quite cynical. I have very little patience for any individual who has no desire to problem solve, has no desire to break something down, and try to analyze it, and build it back up or has no desire to explain adequately, and that’s been very difficult.” She/he admitted being critical, saying, “The way I learned is not the way these kids learn, and it has been a struggle for me at times to find a way because I know that they can get it if I give it to them in the right way, but to find that right way is sometimes difficult for me.” Taylor admitted to never expressing a desire to work with underprepared students and clearly, Taylor’s expectation of encountering students who want to learn, accept challenges and apply higher-order thinking skills to problems and tasks remains unfulfilled. See Taylor’s *wordle* (Appendix I).

**Shelby.** Shelby considered herself/himself an experienced teacher, having had a variety of experiences first as a substitute, then moving on to teach middle school English and currently teaching high school English. The first six years were spent teaching freshman English and the past two years have been devoted to seniors and AP English.



Shelby discussed prior work experiences that led to training/management positions, indicating her/his ability to direct others. Shelby discussed several influences, such as family, educational experiences, and natural abilities, which have shaped her/his career path. First, Shelby is a first-generation college student who witnessed vocational and literacy challenges with parents and grandparents. Shelby said, “My Mom and Dad were kind of beat up and worked where they could” and “having to read letters in the mail to my Grandparents was a wake-up call.” Shelby indicated there was no explicit message that she/he would go to college, but her/his father encouraged a focus on schoolwork and supported interests in school. In fact, Shelby described herself/himself as an irregularity, saying, “I seem to be an anomaly, especially on my Dad’s side of the family. I’m the first to graduate from high school, and just one other on my Mom’s side.” Shelby indicated that “school came naturally to me” and “as an only child I liked being around other kids.” Shelby “enjoyed the social aspect, mathematics, social studies” and a wide variety of school activities including sports, academic team and theatre. Teachers often asked Shelby to assist other students, who was recognized for her/his reading ability. Shelby admitted that teachers and friends were influential factors, both leading and pointing Shelby into activities that provided opportunities for travel and engagement that she/he might not otherwise have had. Shelby admitted always wanting to be a teacher and began college undergraduate work with this career goal in mind. Importantly, Shelby felt she/he can relate to students, saying, “I think I have a background to understand kids whose Mom and Dad did not go to school or barely made it through. I get a lot of kids that think that’s what life is and they can’t do any better” and strives to reverse this kind

of thinking. I sensed Shelby was secure in her/his position as a teacher and empathized with students who are underprepared.

**Tracey.** Tracey has taught high school English courses for six years, the first three with freshman and the remaining with juniors and seniors. Tracey viewed teaching as one of her/his callings, alongside physical fitness training as well as real estate and property investment—all of which provide opportunities to instruct and assist others. Tracey sees herself/himself as one who motivates others and posts the following quote in her/his classroom, “No Bird Soars Too High if He Soars With His Own Wings”—*William Blake*. Tracey said, “Students don’t realize their potential until someone shows them and tries to motivate them and tells them what they need to hear whether it’s easy to say or not.” Tracey admitted that she/he prefers teaching students who have potential for growth, not necessarily the students who are high achievers, saying, “I work best with those that need help, that want help and maybe have had a difficult home life.” Several influences have shaped Tracey’s career path including family, athletics, and educational experiences. Several of Tracey’s family members were educators, her/his Mom taught kindergarten for thirty-five years, but she/he admitted this was not the first career consideration: “I never thought of myself as a teacher, but developed this sense through sports and leadership activities.” Tracey discussed the immense value placed on education by family as well as the need to advocate for children and concluded, “I had a really good educational experience growing up.” This perspective continues to permeate Tracey’s teaching philosophy, saying, “I look at teaching from an advocacy perspective, if I’m not helping kids, then I shouldn’t be doing what I’m doing.” Tracey also said, “My Mom never accepts failure and that has stuck with me.” Tracey recognized shortcomings

associated with the teaching profession, saying that “teachers carry preconceived notions about the population of students and their abilities” and “I have found what you hear about students is not true until you build a relationship and get to know them. Then you learn the reality.” Building connections with students, “sharing experiences” and “providing a support system” are important, especially “building their sense of control.” Adding, “Since I have been here, the ETC is one of the best programs we have brought to the school. In education we have support for high and low achievers, but the other kids are left out.” Taylor’s identity is formed by her/his passion for teaching and a strong sense of purpose.

**Morgan.** Morgan, a fifth-year teacher, reported a family that valued hard work, education, learning and reading; a family that was very encouraging and supportive. Morgan indicated that although her/his parents did not attend college, they were very smart people with an entrepreneurial spirit. Morgan said, "It was understood that education was important and I could do anything that I wanted to do." Morgan said his/her instincts and natural teaching ability came from her/his mother; yet even though she/he received support from family, she/he has always had the tendency to place limitation upon herself/himself and felt this may have been transferred from her/his mom saying, “She was one of those people that no one ever told her how smart she was. I fight that instinct in me because I think you can’t do that because here’s where you belong.” Despite this, Morgan has excelled in many professional settings that are pressured environments and she/he is frustrated by the lack of support or sense of value to the classroom she/he has experienced as a teacher. Morgan discussed the shortfalls of the education profession and struggled to find recognition/positive reinforcement for her/his

hard work, saying, “I fight every day not to burn out.” Morgan sees herself/himself as a teacher who provides support and parenting to students who do not receive encouragement from home and admitted that she/he forms relationships with students who are perceived to be problem students, recognizing their ability when their behaviour in school and grades in classes do not reflect success. Morgan questioned her/his teaching effectiveness, saying, “I was having a struggle with being a bad teacher and thinking I was failing miserably,” but admitted that receiving recognition from students that she/he is a teacher who cares has been a rewarding aspect of the job. Adding, “A committee randomly picked 15-18 students and had a roundtable discussion with them and found that I was one of the teachers who care about students. I am happy about that. That’s pretty amazing to me after just being here for one semester.”

**Blair.** Blair, a seasoned teacher, highlighted a family value system that emphasized and appreciated book ownership, reading for pleasure, critical thinking, travel, history, the teaching profession and internalized morals, specifically behaviors considered right or wrong. Blair said, “I will tell students, like my Dad always said, ‘never throw books away. You never throw books away.’ I tell students to take care of books and try to read different things.” Blair described an owl, made by her/his previous year speech students. The owl, orange with large penetrating tan eyes, was made from construction paper and encased by a silver, tinseled, sparkly wreath; it remains as a permanent fixture on Blair’s classroom door. The students presented the owl to Blair as part of school project, and Blair indicated this to represent the image of herself/himself as “always present, always seeing them, it’s like you are always watching us,” she/he said. Blair admitted that she/he monitors student conversations on Twitter and Facebook and

tries to influence them both inside and outside of the classroom on what is appropriate and inappropriate. Blair also sees the owl as a symbol of wisdom and shares her/his knowledge with students and novice teachers. Blair said, "I do like to think I'm wise, wise in more things than just my content area and I try to share with students as much as I can about other things, the job market, politics and what's going on in the world, to understand what's beyond our classroom." Blair recognized the teaching profession has shortfalls and described injustices that she/he has experienced/observed, particularly with testing practices, lack of connectedness among colleagues as well as education decision makers and teacher attitudes. Blair said, "In middle school, the teachers would not let them read a book if it wasn't at a certain level. That is not fair. Even I, as an adult, will return to books that were childhood favorites." Adding, "If I can't articulate where the problem is in student writing, then how can I ask a student to revise something?" Blair is not certain why she/he decided to enter the teaching profession, but imagined it is because of her/his immense personal love for reading. Blair effortlessly discussed poetry, conventional literature, curriculum and its application and/or transference to other situations, in a manner that suggests her/his classroom is lively and organic, taking the shape of the immediate concerns of students and her/his informal assessments of student understanding. See Blair's image (Appendix J).

### **Research Setting**

I made onsite visits to nine schools and an educational facility to conduct research for this study. The onsite visits occurred between February 6, 2013 and April 19, 2013. Each school is described using the following data sources: the Kentucky Legislative Commission (school population/district profiles, 2010) and School Report Card

documents (2010-2011) published by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) website. The following table provides a general description of the schools that participated in the school-university partnership. Ten participants from nine schools agreed to participate in this study.

Table 3.1

*School Demographics*

	Free/Reduced Lunch	Est. Enrollment (grades)	ACT English/Reading	Transition to College
School A	52%	1722 (9-12)	18.1/19.3	68.7%
School B	52%	1034 (9-12)	18.1/19.3	45.4%
School C	68%	*	17.6/18.5	51.7%
School D	52%	478 (9-12)	19.0/19.3	74.5%
School E	40%	894 (9-12)	19.6/20.4	70.8%
School F	51%	490 (5-12)	21.0/20.6	75.0%
School G	72%	800 (PS-12)	18.4/18.8	66.1%
School H	79%	762 (9-12)	16.3/17.9	47.7%
School I	54%	813 (9-12)	20.3/20.8	73.7%
School J	49%	750 (10-12)	17.7/18.5	47.6%
School K	83%	850 (9-12)	16.6/17.7	50.8%
School L	79%	*	17.0/17.7	20.7%
School M	79%	950 (9-12)	15.3/17.1	43.3%
School N	60%	1200 (9-12)	19.3/21.0	53.6%
School O	60%	1175 (9-12)	18.3/19.7	44.3%
*Unavailable				

### Data Sources

The primary data sources in this study are a series of three, open-ended, in-depth interviews with each teacher participant. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted at respective schools in a location determined by the teacher. When feasible, time between interviews was scheduled no less than three days before or more than one week after the previous interview, permitting participants just enough time to mull over their discussion without losing their connection to the topic (Seidman, 1998).

Qualitative research, due to being nestled within a natural setting, is often characterized as emergent. In such studies, researchers are seen as a key instrument (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), acting as the “ones who gather the information themselves and do not tend to rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) characterize qualitative researchers as *bricoleurs* and note that “the product of the interpretive *bricoleur*’s labor is complex, quilt like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage—a set of fluid interconnected images and representations that connect the parts to a whole” (p. 8).

With this in mind, I determined a specific approach, based on Moustakas’ Phenomenological Model (1994), and selected data collection methods (interviews) that support this approach. I chose Seidman’s (2013) three interview series procedural format for conducting interviews, which is inspired by phenomenology, and followed a systematic method of data analysis based on Moustakas’ (1994) modifications to methods suggested by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973) and Keen (1975). These specific measures empower the researcher, who is the primary instrument for investigation. Hence, primary data sources are limited to researcher and co-researcher (participant) interviews.

Secondary sources of data included participant drawings, pictures and artifacts that elicit or represent individual experiences. Additionally, field notes were maintained throughout the study; these contributed to the development of the investigation and assisted the researcher to “bracket” experiences, adjusting subsequent interviews and match` as a record of the oral discourse and non-verbal cues.

Following Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) open phenomenological approach of a life world interview, I began by setting the interview stage. This included briefing the interviewee by defining the situation for the subject, discussing the purpose of the interview, and discussing the use of a sound recorder (a debriefing, giving the interviewee the opportunity to add comments or resolve questions, follows the initial briefing and interview).

Then, I followed Seidman's (2013) three series interview design: the first establishing the context of the participants' experience, the second allowing the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context it occurred, and the third allowing the participants time to reflect on the meaning of their experience (Seidman, 2013, p. 21).

Importantly, I found ways to guard against potential biases that the participants may have had. First, there may have been an intimidation factor for co-researchers, who may have seen me as an authority figure, representing a University and involved in the creation of the high school-University partnership. One way I guarded against this potential bias was to remove myself from the ET meetings, creating distance between my role as a program leader and my role as researcher. Another way that I guarded against this potential bias was to emphasize the research purpose—to describe teacher experiences, not to assess teacher effectiveness. Additionally, I shared the image I hold of myself as a teacher along with my personal secrets, my struggles and triumphs, in order to establish trust and recreate a balanced power structure—that of a colleague or co-researcher.



Initially, I sensed hesitance, reluctance and even a feeling of intrusion among some participants, suggesting an uncertainty about the interviews and their purpose. My field notes indicated that Kelly seemed particularly hesitant and wary of my intentions, almost as though she/he was deciding whether “this was going to be okay,” but by the end of the interview was reassured. I remember wondering if Kelly would agree to follow through with remaining interviews. Because the first interview focused upon sharing prior experiences and bracketing those experiences, this potential bias was diminished. During the first interview, after discussing my background and then asking Kelly to discuss her/his own, Kelly was visibly caught off guard and responded, “I don’t know where to start, so I didn’t expect...” During the second interview, Kelly said, “That’s kind of interesting because I didn’t think about my mom or parents like that and how they affected me that much until... she [Mom] did a lot. It was interesting too and that helped talking about it.” Although other participants did not verbalize the impact of self-reflections through bracketing exercises, I noted non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and subsequently more candor when discussing background and teaching experiences. I sensed that teachers appreciated this private time, when they could discuss their histories and their teaching experiences. For some, it was difficult to focus on discussions that pertained specifically to the ETC; they talked about teaching holistically and/or discussed other classes that they felt either more comfortable or preferred teaching. This required an open stance as a researcher and the ability to redirect the interview focus. Overall, the bracketing exercises and the interview protocol served to guard against potential biases.

## **Interview 1**

During the first interview, I focused on the participants' life histories, particularly their professional experiences as teachers. To begin, I discussed personal photographs and a montage that represented my history as a teacher and the image I hold of myself as a teacher. This activity helped to "bracket" my experiences so that I could examine them from a standpoint of conscious observation and establish a communicative exchange that sets aside prejudgments or biases that could hinder participant responses and/or my receptivity. I asked the participants to reconstruct their earlier experiences with family, school, and previous jobs, but more importantly their professional experience as a teacher. I asked questions like, "Tell me about your past life, up to becoming a teacher" and "how did you become interested in teaching students who are at risk or underprepared?" As a closing task, I asked the participants to bring a photo(s) or draw a picture that represented their history as a teacher and the image they hold of themselves.

## **Interview 2**

For the second interview, I focused on the details of their experience with planning and teaching an ET course. To begin, we discussed the photo(s) or picture that represented their past and self-perception. I repeated some of their comments from the previous interview regarding prejudgments, prejudices or biases that may have influenced personal and professional experiences. I asked the participants to remove these mental fabrications to the best of their ability so that their recollection/description were uninhibited by any predispositions. To elicit discussion, I presented photographs of collaborative meetings, example lessons, and documents that were shared at meetings. I began by showing a picture of one of the ETC collaborative meetings and pointed out

that the group included University faculty as well as other ETC teachers in different schools. I also presented handouts from meetings (e.g., Common Core State Standards for language arts, example lessons, concerns or questions that arose in meetings). Then I asked the participants, “What is like to plan an ET course through collaborations with University faculty?” In following, I asked them to think about their individual school and the place where they prepare lessons and/or units of study. Then I asked the participants, “What is it like to plan course goals, units of study and individual lesson plans?” Afterward, I asked the participants to think about and describe their students. Then I asked, “What is it like to teach an ET course?” As a closing task, I asked the participants to bring in an object to the final interview that represents their experience with planning and teaching an ET course.

### **Interview 3**

For the final interview, I focused on the participants’ reflections about what it meant to teach an ET course. First, I asked them to share and discuss the object that represented their experience; what it represents and why they chose it. Then, I asked the participants what it meant to them to create an ET course for students who are underprepared, what it meant to them to teach an ET course to students who are underprepared, and what it meant to them to collaborate with faculty outside of their school. Finally, I asked how this experience affected their view of themselves as teachers (Appendix K).

With a phenomenological philosophy in mind, I determined a second line of questioning that in some cases deviated away from the interview guide, and prescribed rules for interviewing or mental fabrications of what questions should be asked next. The

second line of questioning was based on situational cues and intuition (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Protection of Human Subjects was ensured through Internal Review Board approval prior to conducting the research (Appendix E). Permission to conduct interviews was obtained from school administrators and teachers before entering the sites. Participation was voluntary. The participants were ensured confidentiality and asked permission to use a digital recording device to record their interviews; they were also told the purpose of interviews, how data would be secured, the expected benefits of the research and how results would be disseminated. All digital recordings were transcribed verbatim.

To secure initial participant involvement, I used two methods of communication following a three-step procedure. First, I contacted participants initially by email, indicating the purpose of the study, the number of interviews, their anticipated length and the interview location. Second, for those who did not respond, I contacted school principals via email, requesting their permission for teachers to participate in the study. Once permission was received, I forwarded the email response to the ETC teacher requesting 10 minutes of their time to discuss the research project. According to teacher preferences, I made a follow-up phone call to secure their involvement. Finally, I made additional calls to the remaining teachers. For anyone who was not available at the time of call or did not respond to a voice message, I sent a final email message restating the confidentiality and purpose of the research. Consequently, I obtained 10 verbal agreements to participate in the study. A signed letter of confidentiality and informed consent was secured from each participating teacher prior to data gathering.

## Data Gathering

To begin, an interview protocol was trialed prior to this study. As a result, I learned that questions were too specific and did not provide respondents enough opportunity to elaborate on their experiences; thus, I altered the interviewing procedures and instruments. Additionally, I consulted with experienced qualitative researchers to develop the understanding and skills necessary to commence with this investigation and ensure interview quality. In the following tables, I describe a tentative study timeline, the actual study timeline, a projected data collection timeline, and an actual data collection timeline.

Table 3.2

### *Tentative Study Timeline*

Date	Activity
October, 2012	Initial contact with schools to secure agreements to participate (10-12 ETC teachers)
November, 2012	Finalize dissertation proposal
Early December, 2012	Defend dissertation proposal
Early January, 2013	Submit proposal to IRB for approval
Mid-January, 2013	Secure informed consent pending IRB approval
Mid-January, 2013	Schedule interview sessions with study participants
February-June, 2013	Conduct participant interviews
June-July, 2013	Analyze interview data
August-November, 2013	Finalize dissertation
Early December, 2013	Defend dissertation

The following table reflects the actual timeline versus the anticipated timeline.

Table 3.3

*Study Timeline*

Date	Activity
October, 2012	Initial contact with schools to secure agreements to participate (10-12 ETC teachers)
November, 2012	Finalized dissertation proposal
December 10, 2012	Dissertation proposal defense
Early January, 2013	Submitted proposal to IRB for approval
Mid-January, 2013	Secured informed consent after IRB approval
Mid-January, 2013	Scheduled interview sessions with study participants
February 6-April 19, 2013	Conducted participant interviews
May-July, 2013	Secured interview transcripts
August-October, 2013	Analyzed interview data
November, 2013-April 2014	Finalized dissertation

Each participant agreed upon a schedule for a series of three, 60-minute interviews, preferably within a one- to two-week time span. The following table provides a tentative arrangement of how interviews were initially scheduled. The timeline was designed to accommodate interruptions arising from various school spring breaks and state testing dates.

Table 3.4

*Projected Data Collection Timeline*

Date	Interviews
February 4-15	Participant 1 & 2, School _____
February 18- March 1	Participant 2 & 3, School _____
March 4-15	Participant 3 & 4, School _____
March 18-29	Participant 4 & 5, School _____
April 1-12	Participant 5 & 6, School _____
April 15-26	Participant 6 & 7, School _____
Table 3.4 (continued)	

Table 3.4 (continued)

April 29- May 3	Participant 7 & 8, School _____
May 6-17	Participant 8 & 9, School _____
May 13-24	Participant 9 & 10, School _____
May 20-31	Participant 10 & 11, School _____
June 3-14	Participant 11 & 12, School _____

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The following table shows the actual interview timeline, considering adjustments for unexpected cancellations and teacher schedules. Also, the schedule considered a variety of spring breaks, state testing dates and the likelihood that teachers would be focused on end-of-year duties and experience difficulty setting aside time for interviews.

Table 3.5

*Data Collection Timeline*

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
	Date, Time, Place	Date, Time, Place	Date, Time, Place
Participant			
Shelby	2/6, 12:30, classroom	2/13, 12:30, classroom	2/26, 12:30, classroom
Tracey	2/8, 12:30, classroom	2/22, 12:30, classroom	2/28, 12:30, classroom
Morgan	2/12, 3:30, classroom	2/15, 3:30, classroom	2/18, 3:30, classroom
Taylor	2/14, 12:30, Tech center	3/6, 12:30, Tech center	3/13, 12:30, Tech center
Blair	2/19, 1:30, classroom	2/27, 1:30, classroom	3/5, 1:30, classroom
Kelly	2/20, 9:30, classroom	3/7, 9:30, classroom	3/21, 9:30, classroom
Pat	2/21, 8:30, Perkins Bldg.	2/25, 12:30, classroom	3/1, 12:30, classroom
Alex	3/7, 2:00, classroom	3/14, 2:00, classroom	3/21, 2:00, classroom
Lee	3/15, 11:30, classroom	3/22, 11:30, classroom	4/18, 11:30, classroom
Jamie	3/20, 10:30, classroom	3/27, 10:30, classroom	4/19, 10:30, classroom

The following table provides examples from a transcript obtained through an interview pilot conducted with an ETC teacher on March 1, 2012. I transcribed the interview

verbatim, which lasted roughly 25 minutes. The pilot interview and trial analysis provided valuable insights into developing procedural and analytical practices.

Table 3.6

*Example Interview Data*

Relevant Statements	Units of Experience		Themes	Verbatim Examples
I have begun implementing lesson plans found online	I have begun implementing lesson plans found online	Online resources	Resources and Websites	It's called a Revision Marathon where students go to different stations to revise their essays
I feel the most important for college and career readiness are probably communication skills both on paper and through speaking and listening	I feel the most important for college and career readiness are probably communication skills both on paper and through speaking and listening	Real world communication skills	Communication and Authenticity	I am planning a workplace writing unit in which students will create cover letters for job applications and letters of recommendations to each other and respond to emails.

### **Data Analysis**

All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. In an effort to save what might be lost in translation, such as the nonverbal messages, ironies and physical presence of the conversants (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), I took notes or recalled the interviewees' tone, posture, and/or nonverbal messages that I perceived and also made note of my own gestures, responses and thoughts about the interview



(reflexive diary) after each interview. These notes were attached to each transcribed interview and became a part of the overall analysis—representing that the oral discourse and narrative discourse should both be documented to formulate a thorough depiction. I asked the transcriptionist to note pauses and utterances that indicate thought and/or tone as well as emotional expressions such as laughter. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) recognize two forms of transcription, verbatim and transformed narrative, and either is acceptable depending upon the research objective.

Since my role, as researcher operating within a transcendental phenomenological approach, was to analyze and synthesize interview data, I chose a verbatim account of each participant interview. Each transcribed interview was analyzed systematically according to Moustakas' (1994) outline: (a) consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience, (b) record all relevant statements, (c) list each nonrepetitive, non-overlapping statements, as the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience, (d) relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes, (e) synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience, including verbatim examples, (f) reflect textual description through imaginative variation, constructing a description of the structure of the experience and, (g) construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience (p. 122).

I created folders for each participant prior to data collection and analysis. To begin the analysis process, I printed all transcripts for each participant, and any artifacts/pictures provided at the time of interview, to complete each participant file. Some artifacts are provided as illustrations/examples to support the outcome of this

project; however, many revealed teacher identity and/or compromised student privacy and are not included to assure teacher/student confidentiality. In addition, I created Excel spreadsheets for each participant and her/his respective interviews, which included columns for relevant statements, units of experience (invariants), themes, synthesized invariants and themes, and verbatim examples. As a first step (epoche), before analysis/examining interview transcripts, I again bracketed my experience by reviewing my visual representation of what it means to be a teacher and reflected on my past and present experiences, both in teaching and collaborating with colleagues. This included reading over my most recent narrative of teaching and reviewing the bracketing exercises included in each transcript at the onset of each interview.

As a second step (transcendental phenomenological reduction), to re-immense myself in the interview, I typed/transcribed my written field notes at the time of interview and examined the research questions so that I would have an idea of relevant statements. While reviewing transcripts, I also took transcription notes on my reactions to the transcripts. These reactions typically took the form of participant tone, repeated words, inferences, judgments and theory memos. As a result of the initial and concurrent processes of bracketing, researcher biases were identified and suspended, thereby “framing intersubjectivity to overcome the illusion of solipsism or my sphere of consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 37). At the same time, I recognized the researcher /co-researcher intersubjectivity and that my analysis of the co-researcher’s experience is intentionally related to my own experience. So, as I looked back, I synchronized my past experience of the co-researcher with the co-researchers’ past experiences (Moustakas,

1994). I then analyzed each transcript individually for significant statements/meaning units or “invariant horizons” of the experience.

With each interview participant and interview series, I systematically reviewed each interview statement for a relevant description of the experience and recorded this information. Second, I listed all non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements and recorded them as units of experience. Then, I identified themes and recorded this information in a separate column. Then, I reviewed and synthesized units of experience with identified themes into a description that represented the texture of the experience (phenomenological reduction). Before completing the textural description, for each participant/interview I copied/printed spreadsheets and dissected/cut the column “synthesized units and themes” associated with each relevant statement, and then organized/analyzed representations, further refining themes.

The textural description was supported with verbatim examples and documented in a separate Word document with a three-column table. The first column included the textural description. I reflected on this textural description and identified and described structures of the experience (imaginative variation) in the third column. I looked at the data with an open mind and a reliance on intuition for whatever might show up. Like brainstorming, where anything that comes to consciousness is viable, I considered the phenomenon from a different vantage point and meaning to discern the structure of the experience, and considered time, space, materiality, causality, relationship to self, and relationship to others (Moustakas, 1994). The second column, “structures,” considered categories, themes, dichotomies, and descriptors for tone. These varied per participant; however, thematic representations began to emerge. I synthesized the textural and

structural descriptions to describe the meaning and essences of the experience at the bottom of the table. I reviewed the series of interviews as a whole to verify unification and thematic representations.

Finally, I created a composite table that included three columns—pseudonyms matched with descriptors for tone, essence, and themes. The essence for each participant examined individual textural-structural descriptions and formed the composite description of the experience as a whole. I looked for overlapping and repeated themes, highlighting words and phrases that aligned with textural/structural themes. Themes were refined, verified and recorded, forming the basis of the common or unifying principles that described the phenomenon of study (essential, invariant structure).

### **Data Analysis Conclusions**

From each individual analysis, I constructed a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

### **Trustworthiness of Findings**

Qualitative studies do not adhere to the traditional quantitative constructs of validity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006); however, it is important to ensure the trustworthiness of findings. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) said, “validity refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world” (p. 324). Thus, qualitative research designs, specifically Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological methods, inherently mediate potential threats to internal validity.

Criteria used to address threats to validity vary. McMillan and Schumacker (2006) recognize *validity*, *reflexivity* and *extension of findings*. However, because the number of participants compromises validity in the traditional sense, I felt Guba and Lincoln's (1998) criteria for *constructivism*, where "the aim of the inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of the construction that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus" (p. 113), offered a useful alternative. Guba and Lincoln (1998) suggest the following criteria for trustworthiness: *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability* and *transferability*. First, I addressed credibility (internal validity) by selecting a research methodology that supported the research aim and questions. I also employed data collection and analysis methods that are rigorous and relevant to the research design. Furthermore, to address other potential threats to internal validity, I considered (a) participants' memory and their recollection of past events and (b) socially accepted answers.

To address the possibility of errors in recollection, I provided participants sufficient time to think about their responses. I specifically asked them to take their time before responding and clarified questions as needed. I reminded them the study was retrospective, requiring them to think about past experiences, and not intended to focus on other aspects of teaching, those unrelated to the interview questions. To activate memories, I discussed artifacts (i.e., ETC meeting agendas, example activities, presentations) and meeting facilities. This enabled participants to recollect their experiences, to comment on the examples provided, and to expand upon their memories/recollections.

To mitigate for socially accepted responses, I began by establishing a co-researcher relationship sharing my own teaching experiences, both positive and negative. Additionally, prior to each interview, I reinforced the confidentiality of the interview sessions that conversations were private and all data would be stored in my office for a period of five years under key and/or passcode. Participants were informed they would remain anonymous and that their names would not be published.

Dependability (reliability) is evidenced by a documented and consistent coding scheme and the practice of member checking. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) describe member checking as an informal activity with participants during data collection. Interview guides provide a mechanism for member checking. At the onset of subsequent interviews, following a statement of confidentiality, I restated participants' comments that seemed pertinent and provided them an opportunity to correct or add to the statement and summaries I formed of the previous interview (reflexive diary entries). At the conclusion of the three-series interview protocol, I asked participants if they felt the interviews captured their experience creating and teaching an ETC and if anything needed to be added and/or clarified.

Confirmability (objectivity) was established through bracketing exercises by the researcher and participants, which represented my recognition of potential biases. Researcher field notes, digital recordings, verbatim transcripts, and transcription notes provided additional mechanisms for confirmation of findings. Further, if transcripts were unclear, by way of transcription error, I confirmed relevant statements by listening to the original audio recordings for clarification.

Generalizability is not the intended goal of this study; however, through richness and depth of details, I demonstrate whether the particular context and phenomenon of this study is transferable to other contexts.

For further explanation, Creswell (1998) provides eight verification procedures and recommends that qualitative researchers “engage in at least two of them in any given study” (p. 203). The eight procedures include: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarifying research bias, (f) member checks, (g) rich, thick description, and (h) external audits (Creswell, 1998). I employed three of the eight procedures including clarification of research bias, member checks and rich, thick descriptions. Additionally, Creswell (1998) noted that “phenomenologists view verification and standards as largely related to the researcher’s interpretation, neither empirical nor transcendental phenomenologists place substantial emphasis on verification beyond the perspective of the researcher” (p. 207). Thus, this study adhered to accepted standards of reliability and validity.

### **Summary**

Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) suggest there are three purposes for writing a dissertation: (a) institutional, (b) personal, and (c) communicative. First, I have acted appropriately to design my research with a sound methodological approach based on acceptable, reliable practices found within the literature base. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe a particular phenomenon: the lived experiences of high school teachers who were responsible for creating and teaching a senior-year English Transition course along with the assistance of

postsecondary faculty. Moustakas' (1994) methods, framework and data analysis guidelines, coupled with interviews using Seidman's 2013 three-interview process, was the best procedure for achieving the research aim. It was important to capture this phenomenon, as it occurred within a time of broad educational reform and uncertainty and will allow others to understand how teachers respond to interventions designed to reduce the need for remediation in reading and writing. Thus, my dissertation contributes to the field of curriculum and instruction with a particular interest in literacy.

Second, this dissertation meets several personal goals. Through the experience of collaborating with local high school teachers, I learned a great deal about my professional strengths as a project manager and the limitations of conducting a large-scale service/research project while addressing research and teaching responsibilities as a tenure-track faculty member. The process of interviewing teachers contributed to a better understanding of their experience, both in contrast to my own and autonomously. Furthermore, through writing this dissertation, I discovered a pragmatic personal epistemology and achieved a personal goal: to apply and understand methodologies and research that emphasize a post-modern view.

Finally, I have communicated my research with both clarity and substance, thereby contributing to scholarly knowledge. I have a passion for assisting the underprepared, helping students recognize their full potential as effective readers and writers. I hope that my teaching and scholarship will continue to develop in ways that assist students as well as teachers and other researchers who hold similar interests.



## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Overview and Introduction**

Capturing the essence of teacher experiences is my research aim; however, I acknowledge my subjectivity as a co-researcher and the inherent difficulties of gazing upon the phenomenon as an objective observer, to whatever extent that is possible. Having said that, I recollect the time engaged in fieldwork and realize this was an exercise of self-awareness and an intense time of reflection. Conklin (2008) said, “Who we are in the context of these conversations invites not only the participant into new awareness’s of self, but also introduces the researcher to herself as well” (p. 34). Beholding the explicit and implicit as they occurred in time and space, the phenomenon of interest itself, as well as my role, were of ephemeral nature, beset by time and space and beseeched by a period of newly established educational and legislative reform. Capturing the essence of a fleeting, unique experience provides a glimpse of what it means to be a teacher and how teachers react to changing conditions. That said, I recognize the role of my voice and subjectivity in the interpretation and expression of the participants’ experiences and descriptions. As Moustakas (1994) explains:

The essences of an experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essence at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following and exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon. (p. 100)

I concede the essence of individual experiences; hence, the collective essence is difficult to fully express, but I accept the following analysis as the most accurate and complete description within the context of this study and my capability. Admittedly,

while gathering data I shared my personal experiences teaching underprepared students and my personal observations of the profession, acknowledging that teaching is more than just content and strategy instruction. Teaching involves reversing negative thought processes, motivating students, setting goals and carefully scaffolding lessons to promote mastery experiences. In addition, I shared my thoughts about colleagues and the profession, namely that teachers are sometimes guarded and unwilling to share the reality of their classroom experiences as well as materials and lessons they find successful. While gathering data, these communications may have shaped or influenced participant responses; however, my field notes on observations of body language and facial expression indicate that participants became more receptive and willing to share their experience. The detail, authenticity, and personal nature of the responses, which may not have been expressed outside of a confidential setting are further evidence of research validity. Additionally, while interpreting data I may have focused on my own biases, seeking responses that address student engagement and motivation and similar views of the profession. However, the consistency as well as the convergence and divergence of shared experiences provided by the participants indicate validity. In addition, through a methodical and conscious observer, and a reflective stance on analyses, researcher biases were mitigated and the expressed findings became a reflection of the common experience shared by teachers involved in this study. Remaining true to Husserlian's 1913/1982 inspired phenomenology, I avoid assertions not supported by what was expressed and favor a limited poetic or stylistic approach (Finlay, 2009).

Decidedly, the thematic representation of teacher experiences provided by my interpretation captures a systemic phenomenon; henceforth, I will provide a metaphorical

depiction of the essence using terminology associated with nature and organisms. This juxtaposition, ostensibly at odds in a study of literacy instruction, intends to reveal the complexity of teacher experiences and the totality of external circumstances as well as internal conditions they encountered. Thus, an analysis of textural and structural descriptions of each participant resulted in an individual essence of what it means to create and teach an ETC. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis revealed four common themes as well as a variety of sub-themes across all participants: (a) Environmental Issues: Climate Control, Barometric Pressure, Ecozones; (b) Sustenance: Satiation, Palatability; (c) Freedom: Control, Chaos, Fluidity; and (d) Cell Functions: Permeability, Homeostasis, Nucleus and Mitochondrion. This chapter begins with a discussion of the common themes followed by a summary.

### **Common Themes**

In keeping with the Husserlian transcendental phenomenology philosophy (1913/1982) and application of Moustakas' conceptual framework and methods (1994), the following scientific theme, environmental issues and subsequent sub-themes, were derived from processes or analytical steps associated with *imaginative variation*; capturing the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Environmental Issues**

Factors surrounding the course played a significant role in teachers' experiences with planning and teaching. Some factors were beyond the teachers' control, situated within the perceptions and/or reactions of others. However, other factors were situated in teacher perceptions and/or reactions to external conditions and could be controlled, provided a state of consciousness was not confronted by individual biases or views.

**Climate control.** Climate is defined as “the usual or most widespread mood or conditions in a place” and control is “to direct the actions or function of (something): to cause (something) to act or function in a certain way” ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)). Often, the term culture is used to characterize a people or a work place, representing an operational philosophy or set of standards. Some participants in this study expressed the term culture in the descriptions of their individual school, associating their school with a perceived or intended culture. However, the term climate, in the context of this study, particularly this thematic portion, represents a mood or condition of a place, the external environment that affected teacher experiences, rather than a philosophy. This is an important distinction, because individuals can exercise control of their environment in order to alleviate impositions, whereas culture is more abstract and difficult to resolve. Importantly, teachers responded differently to their environment. Some were essentially reactive to the prevailing mood or conditions and some were proactive, taking steps to curtail negative moods and conditions. Teachers’ experiences creating and teaching an ETC were influenced by the surrounding climate—specifically, student perceptions of the course.

To begin, the reality of the small school size, staffing and school climate, which included a negative mood, were problematic for Pat. Pat indicated negative perceptions, saying “a lot of students don’t like the stigma of the class.” Kelly appeared uncertain about the future of the course in her/his school and stated, “perceptions of the course are sometimes misunderstood.” Morgan said, “students view the course as “ACT prep and/or see the course as ‘punishment for failing.’” Clearly, negative perceptions or moods associated with students were a factor in what it means to create and teach an ETC

course. Several teachers found it difficult to overcome negative student perceptions and continued to struggle with this aspect of the course. They did not anticipate or respond to the climate favourably, thereby accepting or feeling defeated, and they continued to react negatively to the prevailing mood or conditions. All in all, teachers recognized the negative perceptions held by students; however, some teachers exercised greater control over their environment.

To illustrate, Alex suggested that part of what goes into planning is building a positive perception. Shelby conveyed, “At first students were intimidated by the idea of taking a college course” and looked for ways to remove this student perception. Importantly, Shelby encountered few objections to the course in terms of a negative stigma, as she/he and the others within the school worked to create a positive culture/climate, one of opportunity rather than punishment for test scores. Shelby said, “Planning felt daunting sometimes, trying to make it tangible, something kids would buy into.” Making connections to student interests, to college relevancy and to college literacy were all intentional aspects of planning and instruction.

In addition, Tracey and another English teacher taught separate ET courses in their school. Since the beginning, planning, implementing and refining the course was a co-collaborative effort between these teachers. As a pair, they worked painstakingly to build a positive climate and perception among students and school faculty. Tracey admitted, “I had no clue what it was about, but we talked about it, looked at our English courses and student population and saw how it could fulfill a need.” Tracey added, “When the teacher has buy-in, instead of something handed to you and you are teaching something that you see a purpose, it changes everything.” Tracey and colleagues

embrace a culture of motivation, a culture of assessment-based and realistic expectations, a culture of collaboration, and a culture of college readiness; she/he highlights that “we work so students really know where they are.” Students have to “buy-in” and “we do very challenging things and push them, but they make the choice to take the class. Our number one criterion is they have to be committed to go to college.” Tracey described the actions of planning course goals and building the course as “extremely challenging,” and noted that it was difficult “coming up with a new concept and making it stick, but worth it.” It appears some teachers anticipated the consequences of the prevailing climate and although they required time, thought and preparations, they were able to control for negative environmental conditions by being more proactive rather than reactive.

Clearly, student perceptions played a role in teaching and planning an ET course. Teachers who understood the importance of perception and who worked proactively within their schools to address this factor encountered a more favourable classroom environment. Importantly, low student self-efficacy played a reciprocal role in teacher self-efficacy. In order for teachers to achieve a sense of mastery in themselves, they must work to combat the beliefs that students hold of themselves and thus of the course in which they are enrolled.

**Barometric pressure.** Barometric pressure, also known as atmospheric pressure, is defined as “the pressure of the atmosphere usually expressed in terms of the height of a column of mercury” ([www.merriam-webster.com/](http://www.merriam-webster.com/)). “The atmospheric pressure is the weight exerted by the overhead atmosphere on a unit area of surface. It can be measured with a mercury barometer” (<http://acmg.seas.harvard.edu/people/faculty/djj/book/bookchap2.html>). Additionally,

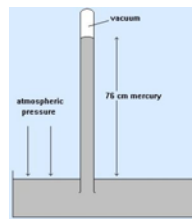
“low pressure areas have less atmospheric mass above their location, whereas high pressure areas have more atmospheric mass above their location.”

([http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Atmospheric\\_pressure.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Atmospheric_pressure.html)).

The greater the atmospheric pressure pressing down on a surface area, the higher the column of mercury that will appear in a mercury barometer.

*Figure 4.1*

*Barometer and Atmospheric Pressure*



<http://www.enviropedia.org.uk/Weather/Pressure.php>

In relation to this study, the weight of barometric pressure or atmospheric pressure is a metaphor for pressures felt by teachers, with teachers representing a surface area. As it relates to teachers involved in this study, barometric pressure represented a variety of forces that teachers faced, specifically standardized testing, teacher accountability measures and graduation rates; the more pressure felt by teachers, the higher the “column of mercury.” As a metaphor, atmospheric pressure is sometimes self-imposed, but often associated with school as well as state and national expectations. In a sense, the mass associated with these overhead, atmospheric pressures—exerted by principals, higher education entities, state legislators and national leaders in terms of accountability measures and graduation rates—affects teachers’ emotional physiological states.

Environmentally, the level of mercury measures atmospheric pressure; alternatively, teacher thoughts/actions measure atmospheric pressures. Mercury is a silver, toxic substance where trace amounts can cause severe neurological damage; extreme efforts are required to avoid or contain a mercury spill. Mercury itself, used to measure atmospheric pressure, does not pose an environmental hazard (unless uncontained), but metaphorically it represents toxicity. Hence, if teachers encounter too much atmospheric pressure, their nervous systems become overexerted and cannot cope effectively and in some cases, they leave the profession. An atmosphere of legislative and educational reform resulted in increased pressure for teachers to improve college-readiness of those underprepared, improve standardized test scores and address school efforts to improve graduation rates, all of which played a significant role in teacher experiences planning and teaching an ETC, some more than others.

Although teachers experienced the effects of standardized testing differently, most expressed thoughts about national standardized tests (ACT) and state standardized tests (Compass, KYOTE). University-school partnership sanctioned tests (Nelson Denney, On-demand writing) associated with the course were sometimes mentioned, usually in a positive vein although we must consider the potential to “fake responses in order to look good, or react in many other ways because of their knowledge of the aspects of the research,” also known as the Hawthorne effect (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 141-142). As an aside, some teachers did not submit test score data, which suggests an additional imposition that was difficult for teachers to implement or fulfill and/or teachers were dissatisfied with student outcomes and perceived this to be a poor reflection of their teaching ability and did not want to expose this perceived weakness. Conceivably, as it



relates to a column of mercury, the absence of test score data could explain a heightened sense of pressure and possibly an effort to avoid a mercury spill.

To begin, Blair's discussions focused upon the need for a team atmosphere, teaching beliefs in general, and teaching frustrations in general, as well as emphasized the inadequacies/injustices of various standardized tests. Blair repeated the terms "fair" and "unfair" when discussing various aspects of the profession, especially when discussing standardized testing practices. It is not clear whether Blair felt this course attained its intended goal, which was to achieve college readiness indicators and allow students to bypass the need for college-level developmental coursework. I sense the success of the course was not favorable or measureable in terms of student outcomes and abandoned, perhaps prematurely. Blair intimated the school demographic and/or number of students who planned to go to college was an obstacle. Blair did say that, "not all students hit benchmark, but most did improve." Possibly, the logistical/scheduling challenges and instructional challenges were too immense or troublesome to address in a period deemed suitable to the instructor and school leadership. Although uncertain, I conceive that the students who would be placed in this course (below benchmark with an expressed desire to attend college) will enroll in a traditional senior-year English course and/or could receive supplemental instruction in another fashion/form. For Blair, the weight or pressure of student achievement expectations placed on standardized tests that measure college readiness was apparent, resulting in the dissolution of a standalone ETC; thus, a heightened level of mercury. Conceivably, expectations were not aligned with the characteristics of the student population; nevertheless, teacher self-efficacy was influenced negatively, both mastery experiences and affective states.

Others recognized the pressures of standardized tests, indicating uncertainty as well as favorability. For instance, Morgan was frustrated with the teaching profession and felt pressured and uncertain about how to address testing requirements, leadership expectations, the content of her/his courses as well as the realities of student needs. Morgan did indicate the course met its intended goal and was happy with a 50% pass rate on final assessments. Additionally, Kelly was uncertain about the future of course assessments, what might come from the Kentucky Department of Education, and how new forms of online assessments could change the course. Overall, Kelly saw the course as an opportunity for students and one that offered tangible evidence of growth. Furthermore, Tracey indicated that assessments for the class were viewed favorably and the 6-point scoring rubric, which was used as a teaching tool, “eases student anxiety about grammar and spelling” issues. For Jamie, planning was difficult at first, but she/he tailored the course to meet students’ needs, based on assessments, using guidelines established by the PLC and Common Core Standards. Jamie said, “I found planning goals really difficult at first, but the PLC and assessments showed me what they needed and I adjusted my lessons and activities to plan for their needs and that made it easier.” For some teachers, the barometric pressure of standardized testing resulted in a lower column of mercury and influenced teacher self-efficacy positively, both mastery experiences and affective states.

Another teacher discussed a variety of factors associated with standardized testing practices, both positive and negative. Alex taught juniors, seniors and AP English courses within a relatively small school “with good discipline” and students “that are conditioned to perform on standardized tests.” Alex added, “The kids are really test

focused, it's something they want to work to improve." Ironically, Alex viewed standardized tests as a limitation to student learning and creativity, saying, "there are ramifications to society, not teaching poetry and creative writing, because it's not on the test. Some kids may never know if they have that talent." However, Alex adapted to the environment, adding, "I saw the ETC assessments as very accessible and the kids could succeed with them" and "I want them to pass the assessments but don't want the ETC to be simply a test prep course." Alex relished the success rates of students in her/his ET courses, saying, "I had kids who really knocked out the Nelson Denney and I think they did really well with the On-demand writing. I was happy with their effort." Alex also added that, "The Compass exam is coming up and I feel more stress and worry" and "it was nice to have ETC assessments that weren't weighted by the State, and feel more accountable for the Compass." Alex is certain that the common state assessment, KYOTE, would benefit students, saying, "The Nelson Denney and On-demand assessments don't transfer to the school where most of the remedial students in this school will go," and "the KYOTE would be a big seller here." Indicators of school success, and accordingly ETC teacher success, contributed to the experience of creating and teaching an ETC. Importantly, teachers reacted differently to accountability measures. Furthermore, teacher self-efficacy seems to be influenced by student mastery.

An additional pressure felt by teachers involved school efforts to improve graduation rates. Overall, teachers commented on the recent trend to improve graduation rates and associated this pressure with their courses—in particular the ETC, a senior-year course created to reduce the need for college remediation. Although college preparedness and the criteria to meet graduation or career preparedness are not entirely

the same, both are inextricably linked in this kind of senior-year English course. An ETC should consider the Common Core State Standards for College and Career Readiness, a national initiative to implement standardization of literacy curriculum. Interestingly, Taylor illustrates the complexity of pressures felt by teachers. Taylor said,

How do I criticize student effort and work in a way the doesn't reinforce their negative self-image, how do I meet students where they are without insulting them and how do I deal with moral dilemma of passing students to meet school graduation rate goals who are clearly not prepared? You're asked to not only accept late work that you told them you would not accept, but you give full credit for it just to pass this kid so the school can have a decent graduation percentage. I don't think that's fair to anybody. It's not fair to the district, to me and it's certainly not fair for the student. It undermines the whole 'this is life' philosophy behind my entire class.

Overall, Pat articulated dissatisfaction with the educational system with the following statements: "A high school education during my parents' time is better than a college education today," "even though we have technological advances, education is lacking," "curriculum is driven by state assessments" and that "changes disrupt progress." Pat added, "The culture here is that all are getting good grades" and this philosophy did not agree with Pat's academic expectations. The barometric pressure, i.e., the overhead pressure to improve graduation rates, pushes down on the surface, creating heightened mercury levels and teachers respond unfavorably.

Our country's leaders contribute to the atmospheric pressure. President Obama's recent State of the Union address illustrated the pressures imposed by our country's

leadership. He said in the opening statement, “Today in America, a teacher spent extra time with a student who needed it, and did her part to lift America’s graduation rate to its highest level in more than three decades.” ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), retrieved on 2/12/2014)

Comments such as these, with their weight exerted from overhead, apply additional pressure to the surface; thus, school leadership emphasize the importance of improved graduation rates, while teachers endure most of the weight and rising mercury levels ensue. Teachers involved in this study would agree they spend extra time with students who need it, but doing their part to improve graduation rates proves somewhat nefarious. Taylor and Pat articulated the frustrations associated with increased pressures to graduate students, pressures imposed by their school administrators. Teachers’ attempt to address student needs, improve student achievement, bolster college and career readiness and promote graduation rates that are undermined by those students who have not met any measure of accountability in test scores, attendance or course assignments. Thus, teachers are clearly at odds with the goals associated with improved graduation rates, which do not truly reflect student mastery. Overall, teachers agree that they feel pressure from school administration to graduate students, hence influencing teachers’ affective states.

In sum, teachers felt pressures from their surroundings—be it the school, the state or the national legislation associated with college readiness—to improve standardized test scores and graduate students, even those they recognize as performing unsatisfactorily. Barometric pressures, and how teachers respond to accountability measures, influence teacher self-efficacy and challenge professional morals.

**Ecozones.** Ecozones “are characterized by the evolutionary history of the organisms they contain. They are distinct from biomes, also known as major habitat

types, which are divisions of the Earth's surface based on life form, or the adaptation of plants and animals to climatic, soil, and other conditions. Each ecozone may include a number of different biomes” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>). In relation to this study, an ecozone is a metaphor for the course, encompassing the evolutionary history of the course within school settings, influenced not only by philosophical and conceptual distinctions, but also by personnel and the organization. Because an ecozone is characterized by the organisms it contains, organisms in the present case include individual teachers, school personnel and organizational needs, school demographics, the school itself and its evolutionary history. These organisms form a region, or the shape and trajectory of an ETC, i.e., an ecozone. The structure of Alex’s course evolved over a two-year period, first as a standalone ETC with fewer students and currently as an integrated English IV with ETC, including more students. Alex indicated this change was due to the number of students identified for ETC as well as organizational needs (i.e., changes that were necessary to accommodate faculty/staffing limitations). She/he was the only designated ETC teacher in the school, having taught a traditional English IV as well as an integrated English IV (ETC). Originally conceived as a course dedicated to college readiness, the ETC later took the shape of a course that addressed traditional English IV and college transitions. Although primarily a personnel/organizational move, Alex expressed that this evolution made sense pedagogically, making it easy to modify a traditional English IV course with college readiness materials and strategies. Because Alex was an experienced teacher, she/he may have influenced the evolution of the ETC in her/his school, suggesting viable alternatives to school administration that could address college readiness needs, personnel limitations and teacher concerns.

While Alex and her/his school seem to have found a region where ETC can co-exist, others continue to grapple with the evolution of their course. To illustrate, Shelby entered the course with a good understanding of the student population through personal and professional experience, saying, “I can relate to their backgrounds” and “I was better prepared to teach ETC because I have taught college-level developmental courses and my experience gave me a good base. I already knew what their struggles were.” Shelby recognized that her/his experience was different from other teachers involved in the project. First, in terms of personal experiences, Shelby was able to relate to students as a result of being a first-generation college student and coming from a family where literacy skills posed challenges. Also, her/his personal evolution as a teacher, including the prior experiences teaching at the postsecondary level, allowed her/him to address student needs early on, whereas other teachers were still in the learning process. Shelby’s teaching experience is characterized by a series of evolutions as well. The course was first created as a standalone ETC, and then evolved to a hybrid English IV with intensive writing and embedded ETC. Currently, Shelby and her/his administration are considering the return to a standalone course. These reconsiderations are largely due to student interest, success of the course, school staffing and state assessment changes that may allow for more fluidity/movement of students between courses within the school. Shelby said, “We don’t call it ETC but we select the students based on ACT scores and do more writing than the other English 12 courses do.” Adding, “we were shocked about some of the kids who signed up we thought had no desire to go to college.” Shelby will continue to find ways to serve this population of students and is considering a school structure where she/he can move students between his/her senior-year classes, as student desires and skill levels

change. Shelby is working to receive certification to teach dual-credit courses, in addition to AP and Senior 12.

Thus, the evolutionary history of the teacher, both personal and professional, as well as student desires and school staffing considerations, contribute to the region or ecozone of the ETC. Another teacher described the ecozone associated with an ETC as a beneficial biome or habitat for underprepared students that contributes to teacher effectiveness. For example, Tracey described several attributes, saying, “It offers a better environment for those that need help.” Adding, “It allowed me to see students for what they could really do, not if they were necessarily a good listener or follow directions; I really got to know them in this class, much more than general English.” Tracey stated that the region associated with an ETC is not only beneficial to students, but also provides professional satisfaction and the ability to differentiate instruction based on individual student needs, as class sizes are typically smaller. Contrarily, some teachers struggled with student needs and school expectations, and thus found the region associated with an ETC to be problematic, specifically when planning for instruction.

For instance, Morgan said, “I fight every day not to burn out, I do not know how to explain it, but I have found it very shocking and frustrating.” Adding, “Hopefully, if I’m around here next year, this summer, I can actually develop a curriculum and say, ‘This is what I’m going to do,’” when speaking about her/his ET course. Planning has provided a particular challenge: Morgan first focused on micro/macro decisions and considered changing to a macro/micro approach as student aptitudes/affinities were better understood. Morgan admitted it takes a special person to teach ETC students and feels she/he is cut out for the job, largely because of her/his ability to connect with and



understand this group of students. Morgan said, “I think it takes a really specific kind of person to figure it out and move forward with it. I’m probably the kind of person that was cut out for this and meant to teach these transitional kids. “I don’t look at them with any preconceived notion and I don’t look at them like a thug or a jailbird. I treat them like human beings, not like my problem kids. I sort-of clicked with some of those kids.” It is clear that Morgan felt a connection and responsibility to the underprepared, but is still navigating his/her path in order to find a place that seems acceptable. School goals and college readiness standards have been difficult to mesh and Morgan felt there was far too much to cover. Although Morgan expressed an affinity for students who pose behavioral problems, she/he admitted the region associated with the ETC is particularly challenging in terms of planning and then synthesizing college readiness goals, school expectations and student abilities. All of which suggests the course will continue to evolve.

Through insightfulness and empathy, some teachers bolstered conditions that break the reproductive cycle responsible for maintaining the status quo, reconciling “cultural capital” and “habitus” of organisms within the ecozone. However, other teachers struggled with teaching preferences and student abilities; the organisms within the ecozone were incompatible. Pat admitted she/he enjoys teaching Honors courses and that an English Transition Course “is not my strength.” Essentially, the goals for the class did not match the reality of the classroom. Pat admitted often feeling lost and relied on religious faith as a source of strength/vision (See Pat’s Object, Appendix L), adding, “Maybe a more compassionate teacher would be better.” I presume the combination of her/his high expectations for mastery of reading/writing, the realities of student

performance, and the availability of student resources/parental support serves as the catalyst for the pragmatic view that college is not a realistic option for many students. Pat expressed such frustrations as, “I spent a lot of time planning while students didn’t respond to activities” and “why should I teach a college prep course to students that weren’t going to college?” Clearly, Pat struggled with her/his definition of “college readiness” and the reality of student abilities found in the classroom. Pat said, “I can’t go to my counselors and say I want students in ETC with a certain ACT score. We just get what we get here.” Adding, “I argued for this with our administration, but we can’t have another English class so that was a frustration.” Pat is uncertain how the school will continue to address underprepared students, saying, “I think we are going that way, that we will track students, not calling it tracking, but intervening,” but added, “how do you intervene if you don’t know where they are?” I sense that Pat has conceded to the premise behind an ETC, but has difficulty reconciling the premise with her/his reality and expectations. Pat’s quality of state of being is expressed as “frustrated” and “uncertain” and she/he prefers teaching students with higher abilities and motivation to learn. Seemingly, the teacher perception of the class is ambiguous. The causation of the course is viewed as a systemic flaw, another change in education that teachers must accept or reject; furthermore, Pat expressed that “the deficits in skills would be better addressed before students reach their senior year. At which time, it is nearly impossible possible to achieve true “college readiness.” As Pat sees it, the ETC is an inadequate solution to a more complicated issue, but it did provide an opportunity to teach an English IV course, a coveted position in her/his school.

Another teacher struggled with student abilities, teacher expectations and the meaning of college readiness means. As a student and employee, Taylor received recognition for her/his writing abilities and leadership skills and entered the teaching profession after working in other professional settings. Her/his expectations were very high and she/he struggled with reconciling these expectations with student capabilities. Taylor said, “Why should I lower the standards and let somebody be mediocre, but is it realistic to expect a certain standard from certain individuals that may not be capable of reaching that standard at this time? So readjusting my standard is a question that I have ... I have not begun to resolve yet.” Foremost, several obscurities come to bare. It was difficult to understand how the criteria of the writing rubric and the level of student writing associated with the course could be deemed passable or acceptable in terms of college readiness. Considering student maturity, Taylor wondered if it was even realistic to hold certain expectations and was equally unclear on whether student attitude led to under-preparedness or if it could be the other way around. Taylor consistently questioned student initiative, saying, “It’s very difficult for me to wrap my mind around somebody that doesn’t have thinking skills and if they have it, they don’t use it. I cannot wrap my brain around somebody who has no motivation. So I’m struggling with, how do I motivate these kids? What’s going to get to them to make them want to do this?”

Additionally, Kelly’s identity plays a significant role in the approach to teaching and difficulties that are faced when this identity is challenged. Kelly recognized the benefit of the class, the emphasis placed on reading and writing strategies, but Kelly preferred the use of orthodox literature and teaching that focused on the appreciation and interpretation of these texts. The ETC represented an ecozone of uncertainty, where the

organisms of the environment may find it difficult to endure as a system; the human activities will not sustain the character of the area. Seemingly, teachers are unable to reconcile the differences between their own “cultural capital” and “habitus” with student “cultural capital” and “habitus”; thus, the cycle of reproduction and status quo persists.

Other teachers experienced logistical challenges, where the seasons and terrain of an ETC, figuratively speaking, were difficult to traverse. Jamie’s frustrations with scheduling and her/his school’s chosen sequence of classes may continue to create stressors and it is uncertain whether her/his concerns will be addressed with school leadership—specifically, those structural/organizational issues associated with student placement and a trimester sequence. Jamie said, “Last year I had a lot students who wanted to go to college, were eager and this year I have a group that doesn’t want to work.” Another obstacle was “senioritis” and “if they pass the first two trimesters they don’t have to pass the third to graduate.” Lee recognized the importance of student scheduling, saying, “My biggest challenge is scheduling, if students have 8 and 9 ACT scores, they won’t do well and I need students that really want to go to college.” Lee felt limited by a partial-year course, adding, “I have to cram a lot into one semester, we won’t go to a full-year course.” Lee admitted that after twelve years of teaching, she/he “is feeling burn-out” and “looking for something new,” preferably at the collegiate level. I perceive Lee’s dissatisfaction stems from increased frustrations with State initiatives, a new “no-zero policy” on the horizon as well as additional record keeping and documentation policies associated with standardization. Lee added, “I don’t mind standards, but I don’t like posting ‘I can’ statements and reminding students over and over. I think that is degrading to high school students and it worries me.” Lee also

expressed concerns about a new teacher requirement, the Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System (CIITS), where teachers post and review lesson plans in an online repository.

Additionally, Blair's experience planning and teaching an ETC was fraught with logistical challenges: first offered as a partial-semester and later as a full-year course that could not sustain enough students to justify its presence in the school. I sense the experience was a burden to school personnel and their view of not only student placement, but also the traditional structure of course offerings. Moreover, I sense the experience was a burden to Blair, imposing planning and teaching challenges beyond that considered realistic to the particular setting; although unclear, it is possible that these are associated with teacher penchants/fatigue and socioeconomic conditions associated with the student make-up.

For some, the ecozone associated with an ETC included very short seasons, creating shortened cultivation and growth periods and a variety of obstacles that impeded progress. Seemingly, school administrators do not understand the time needed to address students' "cultural capital" and "habitus." Teachers, on the other hand, understand the time and effort involved, but lack the influence or ability to initiate structural change within their school. In sum, ecozones, as they pertain to this study, relate to a variety of factors associated with an ETC—their resident organisms, seasons and terrain.

Environmental issues, climate control, barometric pressure and distinct ecozones—as they relate to teacher experiences with creating and teaching an ETC—encompass student perceptions, standardized testing and local idiosyncrasies (e.g., school policy, school demographic, and teacher perceptions) as well as biases and the dynamic

nature of a new course. All of these factors played a significant role in the trajectory of the course and teacher experiences, specifically self-efficacy. Teachers derive a sense of self-efficacy or mastery based on student achievement scores as well as their own ability to adapt to environmental conditions, both internal and external.

In keeping with the Husserlian transcendental phenomenology philosophy (1913/1982) and application of Moustakas' conceptual framework and methods (1994), the following scientific theme, sustenance and subsequent sub-themes, were derived from processes or analytical steps associated with *imaginative variation*; capturing the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Sustenance**

Sustenance is defined as: something (such as food) that keeps someone or something alive; something that gives support, help, or strength. 1a : means of support, maintenance, or subsistence : living b : food, provisions; also : nourishment. ([www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/)). In terms of this study, sustenance refers to collegiality, moral support, school support—the emotional support needed to strengthen or sustain teachers. Sustenance also refers to pedagogical assistance, ideas, materials, and methods for teaching, i.e., the provisions necessary to endure and that provide strength; however, teachers communicate a variety of palates. In this case, teachers communicate various degrees of satiation and palatability when discussing interactions with peers, but overwhelmingly agree that structured opportunities to communicate and collaborate are lacking, specifically within schools. Teachers derive a sense of self-efficacy through communications and collaborations, specifically mastery experiences, vicarious experiences and affective states.

**Satiation.** Water, a necessity of life, is a metaphor for communication and collaboration. Teachers convey a sense of satiation when describing communication and collaboration among peers as well as school leaders. While satiety is typically defined as “a feeling or condition of being full after eating food” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>), this study uses satiety to refer to thirst, a feeling of hydration or dehydration. Water, a covalent compound including the elements hydrogen and oxygen, is essential for living organisms. In this case, hydrogen represents communication and oxygen represents collaboration. Communication is:

The act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else: a message that is given to someone: a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior also: (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>).

Teachers involved in this study expressed the importance of PLC meetings and the opportunity to share or communicate their experiences, notably providing vicarious experiences and improving affective states associated with creating and teaching an ET course. Meanwhile, collaboration is: “to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something: to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>).

Teachers involved in this study expressed the importance of PLC meetings and the opportunity to collaborate, especially for improving mastery experiences associated with creating and teaching an ET course.

In relationship to this study, teachers either directly or indirectly expressed the importance of communication and collaboration among peers; where teachers did not feel this support within their schools, an unfilled need remains. Although communication and collaboration with peers who teach the same courses are ideal, it is not always possible depending upon school staffing. Nonetheless, teachers voiced an overall concern for communication and collaboration among teachers who share a common interest or discipline. Most importantly, the school-University partnership (PLC) was an important aspect of feeling satiated, for some more than others.

To begin, Blair does not restrict her/his role as a teacher to the confines of her/his classroom and initiates efforts to bring community and collaboration to her/his school. She/he sees the social aspect of learning/teaching as a vital component of effective educational practices and seeks ways to implement instructional continuity across grade levels to promote student success. Blair said, "That team atmosphere found in other professions, I really like that and it's something that doesn't really happen a lot in education or here." Adding,

The conversation talking about text, that's something that we don't do a lot of here. We're trying to in some departments, but that discussion about coming to a common understanding, having a clear idea of what the text or a sample of student text should be isn't discussed.

She/he said,

I try very hard to create an atmosphere where we're more of a community than just separate, isolated people, but teachers don't have time. I think that is a part of my personality but I see the need for community, for interaction with other



people. You can't do everything by yourself. I proposed a vocabulary program, something that we could all use instead of me doing one thing and another teacher doing vocabulary another way. For us to have a systematic vocabulary program and begin using in earlier grades, students would improve.

Clearly, Blair did not experience satiation within her/his school and thirsts for more communication and collaboration among peers.

Other teachers emphasized the benefit of a school-University partnership. For example, Morgan clearly valued collaboration with peers and seeks the approval recognition of her/his school leaders, as well as plans to work toward better communications within her/his school. Morgan's reflections about what it means to create and teach an ETC emphasized the feeling that her/his efforts were not appreciated. Importantly, Morgan views collaborations and communication with other ETC teachers, school faculty and school leaders as essential to overall effectiveness in the classroom. When discussing the ETC PLC, Morgan said, "The opportunity to reflect, share frustrations and ideas helped to shape the course." Particularly, the PLC meetings helped to broaden her/his understanding of testing and teaching critical thinking. Morgan experienced satiation when reflecting upon the ETC PLC; however, she/he does not experience satiety when discussing communication and collaboration within her/his school. Importantly, the ETC PLC reportedly influenced her/his sense of mastery and affective state.

Another teacher illustrated the importance of communication and collaboration. Shelby indicated the time spent at PLC meetings was helpful for sharing concerns and ideas for the classroom. Shelby wished for more collaborative meetings with other high

school and University faculty. Shelby admitted that collaborations with other high school teachers and college faculty is important, saying,

Because you get into that fish bowl about how you do things, it's nice to get ideas from other people and anytime you can get a peek into college and see how the other half lives, that sharing helps bridge the gap.

Additionally, Shelby was equipped to share with administrators what other schools are doing. Shelby seeks ways to form connections and communicate with peers, but finds face-to-face opportunities better, saying, "The most productive collaborations are face-to-face, email is a measured response." Shelby expressed the importance of communication and collaboration between school and University faculty, indicating the impact associated with mastery experiences and affective states.

In opposition, Lee did not see school-University communications and collaborations as a source of sustenance. Lee emphasized the benefit of collaborations with other high school faculty and University faculty as a source of information, clarification and moral support; however, she/he did not seem to view this as an essential factor in the development of her/his course. I sense that Lee felt the PLC served its purpose and was not necessary to support/sustain the presence of the course in her/his school. Lee suggested the meetings with University faculty and other high school teachers provided "materials" and "confirmation of what I'm doing right and wrong," and it was "nice to know other teachers experienced the same struggles."

In other instances, the PLC was life sustaining. For example, Taylor realized she/he is "a better teacher she/he thought." Support and collaboration was vital to these

realizations, as the ETC PLC provided “tools, information and moral support,” without which she/he could not have survived. Taylor said,

I think it’s very difficult for someone to come in and try to teach this class, if they don’t really have that collaboration with the University and other high school teachers that are doing the same thing. I just think it would be too difficult. I think that you have very little if any direction, if you don’t have that contact.

Jamie was another teacher who emphasized the utility of school-University communication and collaboration. Jamie’s school entered the PLC during its second year so she/he did not have the materials provided earlier, during first-year collaborations and the summer 2-day professional development event, and thus found the University-school collaborations were essential:

Collaborations outside of school has been a life saver. I was a first-year teacher, teaching a new course and did not know what to do. I would have had no clue what to do without those collaborations with University and other high school faculty.

Jamie suggested that teachers within her/his school work together informally, discovering strengths and weaknesses as means for growth. The school-University collaborations provided materials, perspective, moral support and an opportunity to evaluate strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. Jamie said, “I could see teachers were dealing with similar issues,” “It gave me perspective of what kids really needed in remedial and English classes,” “we bounced ideas off of each other” and found direction with planning. Adding, “Collaborating with faculty helps me to be successful, to address my areas of weakness to improve the classroom.” I sense that Jamie encounters support through

informal collaborations within her school and does not see the PLC as a necessity, now that a foundational understanding has been established, but does recognize the PLC as a vital component to her/his initial success. Importantly, the ETC PLC provided vicarious experiences and interactions among more capable peers, as well as influenced mastery experiences and affective states.

Alex emphasized the benefits of a school-University partnership in terms of both communication and collaboration. Alex entered the PLC and collaborations with University faculty during the second year and admitted, “At first, I felt intimidated, meeting the pilot schools and trying to find my way through the first year. It was like my first year all over again.” But quickly the collaborations became of source of relief, providing a “breath of fresh air,” materials and a frame of reference, thereby reducing isolation and clarifying goals and expectations. Adding, “The Last Lecture lesson provided by another teacher has become a hallmark of my class” and “the Three Person Editing group has transformed editing for me, changing the demeanor of editing and making it a mature discussion.” Alex also said, the book *Readicide*, provided at the summer PD, “really resonated with me and I realized that students should have some traditional literature, but there are contemporary novels that would peak their interest more.” Alex said, “The PLC is really my only opportunity to get a frame of reference with others in the same situation and it shores you up a little bit to know you aren’t in it by yourself.” Adding, “We are isolated here, with no common planning or lunch and no time to collaborate” within her/his school or with other schools in the area, and even so “you can talk with people outside of your school sometimes more freely than with people in your school.” In terms of planning for an ETC, the meetings helped Alex realize, “I

needed to be doing more with non-fiction texts, organized summaries and vocabulary and understood what skills I needed to work on.” She/he appreciated the time with others and being treated like a professional. Alex’s experience collaborating with other high school faculty demonstrates an influence on her/his mastery experiences and affective states.

In sum, teachers expressed the need for communication and collaboration among peers, both intraschool and interschool, as well as between University faculties. These interactions influence teachers’ sources of self-efficacy, vicarious experiences, mastery experiences and affective states, thereby supporting the experience of creating and teaching an ETC in their respective school by providing the sustenance needed to persist.

**Palatability.** Palatable is defined as “having a pleasant or agreeable taste” or being “agreeable or acceptable to the mind” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>). Palatability is the reward or benefit felt by teachers who participated in the PLC and is related to teacher expressions of favorability or unfavorability when discussing interactions with peers and the perceived reward of collaborations. Although everyone conveyed that the school-University partnership was valuable and provided sustenance, there were aspects of the PLC that were considered disagreeable to the palate. In addition, the palatability of PLC declined over time. As teachers became more comfortable with the concept and content of the class, the need or desire for consumption diminished, albeit at dissimilar endpoints. I argue that palatability becomes a moot point if an ET course is proposed and implemented within a given school without opportunities for communication and collaboration among knowledgeable peers and/or University faculty. Nonetheless, palatability as it relates to this study does intersect with teachers’

sense of self-efficacy—namely, vicarious experiences, mastery experiences and affective states.

For some, the ETC PLC challenged assumptions about teaching, and provided rewards or utility within the classroom, but did not agree with pedagogical preferences. For Kelly, the collaborations with teachers—considering time, space, materiality and causality—were a positive experience, with one exception. Kelly struggled to address challenges to her/his assumptions about teaching that are rooted in her/his identity, as an artist and her/his traditional modes of English instruction. Kelly communicated and provided useful lessons/resources, motivation, excitement, inspiration, insights/confirmation of practices, focus, as well as questioning assumptions about teaching and current practices and needed guidance. Saying, “I never thought to actually say, ‘write it this way,’ because I don’t like to do that, but my kids are writing and sounding wonderful.” Adding, “I need a manager, a boss. I need somebody to say, ‘Hey are you going here? Did you try this?’” Clearly, Kelly recognized the reward of collaborations, but palatability is uncertain and requires situations that balance favorable teaching practices with other approaches that are not deemed favorable.

Another teacher indicated a relationship between palatability and the requirement of annual PD hours. The time away from school was not agreeable for Pat, as the benefit/cost analysis was deemed inappropriate given that the shared information did not suit her/his school situation or setting. Pat had mixed feelings about the time and usefulness of ETC PLC meetings. Although it was an opportunity to share with other teachers, it seemed to be a required aspect of teaching that Pat would have preferred more limited and offered only during summer months. Pat expressed a need for more

communication among peers in his/her school; however, the school does not actively support PLCs and teachers lack time. Pat indicated the ETC PLC was well designed, provided information and resources that could be tweaked to fit her/his needs, but the travel posed problems and some activities were not realistic from her/his standpoint. Pat enjoyed the ETC PLC, but said it was also “a little frustrating.” Adding, “The 2-day summer was not as hard, especially if I knew I was getting PD hours” and “I’m not sure that my district would continue providing subs for me to attend monthly ETC PLC meetings.” Clearly two aspects of palatability intermingle: individual perceived reward/benefit and school perceptions of reward/benefit of the PLC.

Morgan struggled with meshing school goals, Common Core State Standards and student abilities and questioned the value of the PLC. For Morgan, the time collaborating with peers was referenced with mixed feelings; she/he questioned the intent/value of some meetings and the lack of communicative clarity among teachers. Saying, “When I was going through some of those transitional meetings and just trying to figure it out and have everything thrown at you, it was a little much.” Also, “I remember some of the teachers that presented, I would feel I’m not sure what I’m supposed to get from this but that was very, very rare most of the time.” Although the sustenance provided did not coalesce, a nutritional value was recognized; however, the experience suggests a negative influence upon Morgan’s affective state.

Meanwhile, Lee discussed the importance of collaborations, but she/he admitted that some teachers are not as willing to share their ideas. Ironically, during my involvement with PLC meetings, I observed that Lee spent much of her/his time outside of the meeting room, conversing with another university faculty member, a previous

teacher and mentor, who was not directly involved with the project. This was one indication of Lee's palatability, preferring to spend time with a one-on-one conversation rather than spending her/his time with the PLC. Furthermore, Lee expressed her/his appreciation of the PLC, but did not indicate that it was an essential aspect of her/his conceptualization of the course. For some, communication and collaboration is not valued as keenly and that self-isolation and/or preservation of teacher autonomy is more palatable; however, I do sense that Lee's involvement, as a more capable peer, assisted other teachers.

Palatability, as it relates to this study, varied among participants. Although most expressed a tangible value associated with communication and collaboration among peers and University faculty, some aspects were considered unfavorable—namely, individual cost/benefit analysis of collaborative meetings and individual affinities for teacher autonomy.

In sum, sustenance as it relates to this study is a prominent element of teacher self-efficacy, influencing mastery experience and vicarious experiences, as well as verbal or social persuasion—all of which are grounded in the themes of SCT. Importantly, need diminished over time as teachers moved from dependency to independence as a result of their participation.

In keeping with the Husserlian transcendental phenomenology philosophy (1913/1982) and application of Moustakas' conceptual framework and methods (1994), the following scientific theme, freedom and subsequent sub-themes, were derived from processes or analytical steps associated with *imaginative variation*; capturing the essence of the phenomenon.



## **Freedom**

Freedom is defined as, “the state of not being subject to or affected by (a particular undesirable thing): the power of self-determination attributed to the will; the quality of being independent of fate or necessity: unrestricted use of something: archaic familiarity or openness in speech or behavior.” ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)). Freedom, as a metaphorical depiction of the essence of teacher experiences and the use of terminology associated with nature and organisms, suggests that the phenomenon of creating and teaching an ETC is an open system. An open system by definition is “a region separated from its surroundings by a boundary that admits a transfer of matter or energy across it” (<http://dictionary.reference.com>). Thus, teachers, as part of the boundary of the system and influential in the transfer of matter across the boundary or region of the ETC, affect the function of the system. Alternatively, a closed system is defined as “a region that is isolated from its surroundings by a boundary that admits no transfer of matter or energy across it” (<http://dictionary.reference.com>). The ETC, as a region or ecozone and the organisms it contains as indicated earlier, is shaped by a variety of influences, including teacher freedom of choice. As such, teachers experienced either a sense of control or chaos, which influenced teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states.

The freedom to create and teach an ETC was a predominant theme throughout participant discussions. Many expressed the term freedom in their descriptions, generally associated with a positive feeling of autonomy and satisfaction. Teachers experienced the power of self-determination and a state of being that was independent of fate or necessity or enslaved by a strict curriculum. Teachers expressed the freedom to select

materials other than those dictated by a preset curriculum and the freedom to teach at their own pace, rather than adhering to a predetermined curriculum timeline. In other cases, this freedom resulted in a sense of conflict and confusion. The ETC posed challenges, with its lack of order or strict guidelines, and teachers experienced a loss of control. In both instances, teachers agreed that instruction was more fluid and responsive to student needs/concerns; while adhering to a daily plan was difficult, student learning benefited more. Importantly, teachers reacted differently to the freedom and fluidity associated with an ETC, influencing teacher self-efficacy either positively or negatively.

**Control.** Control is defined as, “to direct the behavior of (a person or animal): to cause (a person or animal) to do what you want: to direct the actions or function of (something) : to cause (something) to act or function in a certain way”

(<http://www.merriam-webster.com>). Through the power of self-determination, teachers experienced a greater sense of control when creating and teaching their course. Alex’s experience with planning and teaching an ETC, though it required changes and adaptations to a familiar approach, provided a sense of freedom and control. Alex emphasized that the ETC “was the impetus to provide more contemporary literature to students that aren’t mature enough for traditional literature.” Adding, “I like the freedom I can choose things I think the kids would like” and “planning the course goals was new and I was excited I could do what I wanted. I thought it was a breath of fresh air having the creative control.” Alex also noted that “they trusted me here with the program. As long as we meet college goals, it’s up to me to get there.” Alex clearly appreciated the latitude provided by her/his school administration to direct the course as she/he saw fit and the newfound freedom of a course not overtly controlled by traditional course materials.

For Shelby, planning the ETC was similar to other courses, but she/he expressed that there was less structure and “more freedom” to choose materials. Shelby described the ETC as “liberating” because students want to be there and see the benefit. Shelby structured the course like a college course, providing a syllabus and looking for ways to impart the relevancy of assignments and instruction to a college curriculum/experience. In her/his case, the students and teacher felt a sense of freedom, liberated from a traditional senior-year course, one that does not consider student concerns/needs.

Two teachers acknowledged the freedom to be more creative. First, Lee recognized the subjugation of governing principles and found ways to infuse creativity and freedom into teaching practices even though curriculum maps and Common Core State Standards are somewhat stifling and unrealistic for her/his students. Adding, “I took readings from my English class and supplemented it with readings from the Mercury Reader, the literary units aren’t as big” and “tied Macbeth to Black Sabbath” for interest. Meanwhile, Kelly viewed planning and teaching an ETC as an opportunity to try new things in the classroom and to be creative. In fact, Kelly admitted that teaching an ETC provided opportunities to use modern texts and media and discuss their effective use; however, Kelly’s love of literature was clear and ironically, the transition to using other types of text was difficult to make. For Lee and Kelly, the ETC provided the freedom to restructure traditional units and opportunities to be more creative with lesson plans.

Jamie expressed several attributes associated with the course: “provides an opportunity,” “is writing intensive like AP,” “promotes personal satisfaction,” “provides flexibility and freedom,” and “addresses student needs and one-on-one individualized instruction.” Jamie also noted: “The ETC gives students a chance to see what a college

course looks like and an opportunity to catch up;" "I can shape and mold the students a little bit more;" it "provides an opportunity to focus on areas they need the most work," and "I can spend extra time to master skills" in contrast to other classes that require a pacing guide. Jamie expressed that "I can use materials that are relevant and interesting to students" more so than other courses that have a prescribed curriculum. For Jamie, the ETC provided the freedom to address student needs, offering individualized instruction and lessons that promote student engagement and mastery experiences.

Another teacher discussed the freedoms associated with an ETC and how the entire school curriculum was transformed. Tracey exclaimed the ETC has "changed the way we look at planning overall." Adding, "The backward planning, knowing the skills needed and once we started having success with that approach, we started looking at our juniors the same way. What are the skills they need and how are we going to get them there?" Tracey also said, "The ETC offers a chance to challenge students" and "provides freedom when selecting course materials." Importantly, the ETC course has changed the school curriculum: "I think our entire curriculum has changed because of transitions." For Tracey, the experience of planning and teaching an ETC not only provided the freedom to select course materials, but gave school faculty an new way of looking at their curriculum, influencing teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states.

In sum, the freedom associated with creating and teaching an ETC was apparent, providing more control over decisions, promoting teacher autonomy and thereby influencing teacher affective states positively. Additionally, because student abilities and interests were a consideration, student self-efficacy was reformed, in terms of both mastery and affective states.

**Chaos.** Chaos is defined as, “complete confusion and disorder : a state in which behavior and events are not controlled by anything” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>). For some, the freedoms associated with an ETC, unrestricted by a predetermined curriculum, resulted in frustration and confusion. Chaos is a sense of disorder and confusion and can be the result of situations where a limited amount of structure governs actions and decisions. Structure can be misconceived, yet buoyed by school leadership and/or national or state standards, and is dependent upon individual/school applications and interpretations. Although the Common Core Standards offer a guideline for teachers to apply, some responded to the freedom of planning, creating and teaching unfavorably.

For example, Taylor struggled with planning, especially in the first year, and described her/his experience as “all-consuming,” unsure of whether her/his goals for students meshed with the course goals and constantly looking for resources. Taylor said, “I became a workaholic and I’m pretty sure that I was working harder, not smarter because I was struggling. I felt like I had to be planning it all the time. If I didn’t have kids in the classroom, I was planning. If I was at home, if I were on a trip somewhere, I always had a big bag with me. I was always trying to find stuff and do stuff and figure out how to implement, to try this and to try that and will this motivate them and just I struggled so much.” For Taylor, the course posed planning challenges and influenced self-efficacy negatively, specifically her/his mastery experiences and affective state.

Other teachers expressed their frustrations with looser oversight of curriculum and school policy. First, Kelly indicated that planning/teaching the ETC offered freedom, less structure in planning, fewer restrictions in terms of predetermined texts, yet she/he articulated the specifics were strained. For example, Kelly said the “biggest challenge

with the English transition course was finding materials.” Second, Morgan admitted that she/he disliked the planning process, felt “disorganized and chaotic” and admitted that “I need more structure, I put things off, I need more time and if people would let me breathe, I could get more done.” Adding, “I need structure and maybe need to submit plans.” For Kelly and Morgan, the lack of predetermined materials and structure negatively influenced teacher self-efficacy, specifically their affective state. For Morgan, the experience was trying. While she/he expressed the need for breathing room, she/he also expressed the need for more accountability to school administration, indicating a particularly troubled state of being.

In sum, the freedom associated with creating and teaching an ETC was too daunting. The perceived disorder associated with a course that did not adhere to strict curriculum guidelines was too difficult to manage, thereby influencing teacher mastery experiences and affective states negatively.

**Fluidity.** Fluidity is defined as “the quality or state of being fluid : the physical property of a substance that enables it to flow” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>).

Another definition, which adds to the context of this study, is “the quality of being likely to change repeatedly and unexpectedly” (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>). In sum, teachers agreed fluidity was a constituent of planning and instruction, and also that the broad goals for the course were easier to discern; however, daily lessons and units of study were more fluid, requiring frequent changes that were difficult to predict.

Shelby described the course as “organic,” saying, “The ETC reacts more to student concerns” and that “students are more self-aware of their weaknesses and we address those as they arise in class.” Shelby added, “Sometimes I don’t have plans to

address student concerns,” but adapted interferences to daily plans. For Shelby, the fluidity of the course influenced student and teacher self-efficacy, namely mastery experiences.

Jamie admitted it was difficult to describe what is done daily in the classroom, saying, “Sometimes I have something planned and they may struggle or really get it so I find myself altering daily plans during class for anything that is or isn’t working.” Adding, “I took the Common Core and tried to hit what they needed to plan for individual lessons. I thought the Common Core Standards made it easier to plan for individual lessons and I used it as a guide.” For Jamie, the fluidity of the course posed challenges; however, she/he was able to address student needs with specifics provided by the Common Core Standards, which influenced student and teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences.

Other teachers acknowledged the fluidity of daily plans. First, Morgan felt meshing school and state goals was a challenge, but planning was by and large an evolutionary process and several realizations became known. Morgan felt the course itself should remain fluid, flexible and responsive to student needs, less rigid than other courses. Secondly, Blair remembered preparations being different; she/he wondered what was needed for the course and for students and did not typically map daily lessons, but understood the overall course goal.

In sum, the fluidity associated with creating and teaching an ETC was apparent. Teachers expressed a need to remain flexible and responsive to student concerns. This permitted freedom to flow in a direction and at a pace deemed suitable for instruction seemed to influence student and teacher self-efficacy, namely, mastery experiences.

Freedom as it relates to this study, particularly in instances of control, chaos and fluidity, either enhanced or confounded teachers' experiences with creating and teaching an ET course. For some, the freedom of the course offered experiences that bolstered student and teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and their physiological emotional states. For others, the freedom of the course hindered teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and their physiological and emotional states. Overall, the fluidity of the course, in particular the ebb and flow of daily plans for instruction, was a recognized characteristic, influencing student and teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences.

In keeping with the Husserlian transcendental phenomenology philosophy (1913/1982) and application of Moustakas' conceptual framework and methods (1994), the following scientific theme, cell functions and subsequent sub-themes, were derived from processes or analytical steps associated with *imaginative variation*; capturing the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Cell Functions**

Teaching an ETC presented certain challenges and difficulties for the participants in this study. Metaphorically, the anatomy of an animal cell as well as the function of cells and cell parts capture the challenges associated with teaching; these represent the interactions of students, teachers and the course. The following concepts illustrate these interactions: (a) cell membrane permeability, (b) homeostatic equilibrium, (c) cell nucleus, and (d) cell mitochondrion. Comparisons of teacher experiences with cell membrane, equilibrium and nucleus are normative, in that the experiences were common among participants. Comparisons of teacher experiences with mitochondrion are



ideographic: These are depictions of individual experiences that were not common among participants, but can be illustrated as a common phenomenon.

**Cell Membrane permeability.** Cell membrane and cell permeability are defined as:

A phospholipid bilayer interspersed with proteins as depicted in the Fluid Mosaic Model. Its structure and composition makes it selectively permeable (or semipermeable), which means not every substance is allowed to enter or leave the cell. The cell membrane controls which substances can go in and out of the cell. It can allow a particular substance to pass through at a certain time, and then reject the same substance at a later time. (<http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary>)

Students represent a cell and cell membrane. They selectively choose the substances—in this case the instruction or content provided by the external classroom environment—that they accept or reject. For living cells to function properly, substances should pass through the membrane wall, which is known as permeability. Semi-permeability allows some substances to enter the cell while blocking others out. Ideally, students function as semi-permeable membranes, selectively deciding what to let in and what to prohibit, but in the case of teaching underprepared students, teachers characterize their experience as that of impermeability. In cases when diffusion or transport of substances across the cell wall does occur, there is a sense of satisfaction, as it is more pronounced than cases when permeability is generally the rule and not the exception. Metaphorically, teachers' experienced permeability/diffusion with students in other courses more readily than with students in an ETC. Additionally, diffusion took considerably more time with ETC students when compared to students in other courses. To begin, teachers expressed the

difficulty of teaching, characterized as impermeability. Cell permeability influences self-efficacy, both teacher mastery experiences and affective states, and student mastery experiences.

**Impermeability.** Impermeable is defined as “not allowing something (such as a liquid) to pass through, or more broadly, “impervious” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>). In general, teachers characterized their students as being impermeable.

Lee illustrated the effects of impermeability, saying, “I feel like I can’t break through to some of them; it’s a heavy burden to try to teach concepts they can’t understand” and “I like to see growth in writing, but it is frustrating with ETC because you don’t see a lot of growth.” Additionally, “it was a mass effort to teach summarizing and paraphrasing” and “exhausting because you are doing so much work yourself.” Lee’s quality or state of being is expressed as “burdened and frustrated”: Burdened, because of trying to teach concepts and standards to students who are not equipped to understand or appreciate them; and frustrated because planning and teaching requires more than just content in order to see growth. Lee’s experience emphasized a lack of understanding or knowledge on the students’ behalf and perceived student impermeability.

Other teachers attributed lack of permeability to student attitudes. Alex said, “They have a defeatist attitude, they got behind so long ago they don’t see the point.” She/he added that they “don’t equate education with a way out” and “don’t know another type of life” and it becomes “aggravating when you get kids that aren’t working.” Jamie said, “I see a resistance and lack of effort, but they don’t want to admit they are behind.”

Shelby indicated that students struggle with motivational and organization issues, that many feel “defeated” and are shockingly undecided about their future. These teachers emphasized the influence of student dispositions and impermeability.

Another teacher emphasized students’ lack of understanding and misperceptions. Blair admitted students have misperceptions about their abilities and was confronted with this challenge as well as the difficulty of explaining basic skills. Blair said, “Most of them would not describe themselves as underprepared. They don’t like that.” Blair further added, “One issue about the course, the connection of the grades and skill, it is hard for kids to understand they are missing something when they get A’s and B’s in English classes.” She/he also noted, “It was difficult trying to explain the basics about essay writing to students who really don’t have any concept of the function of a paragraph.” Consequently, student perceptions and the actual skill levels that are expected/required of high school seniors do not align, adding further confusion and frustration for teachers. Blair admitted that she/he was picked to teach the course and had never taught this specific group of students and struggled with ETC students’ lack of knowledge and ability to grasp discussions that were meant to extend topics: “Sometimes they can’t follow, if someone asks a question I will extend the discussion and students will say ‘why are we talking about that.’” These interactions/comments demonstrate the limited capacity that students have in regard to critical thinking and making connections to concepts/topics of discussion. Blair’s experience emphasized a lack of understanding or knowledge and misconceptions on the students’ behalf and perceived student impermeability.

In sum, teachers act as agents or catalysts, delivering substances to students and experiencing resistance or impermeability in turn. These interactions with students are attributed to several factors: student lack of understanding or background knowledge, student dispositions and student misconceptions, all of which constitute the structure of their cell wall and the phenomenon of impermeability. Impermeability influences teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states as well as student self-efficacy and mastery experiences. Nevertheless, teachers express satisfaction when students allow substances to permeate their cell wall and achieve success.

**Permeability and satisfaction.** Permeability is defined as “the state or quality of a material or membrane that causes it to allow liquids or gases to pass through it” (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>). As indicated, the quality of students, when characterized as a cell membrane, do not allow substances or instruction to pass through; however, when the students (membrane) are permeable and diffusion of substances does occur, teachers express satisfaction.

Several teachers illustrate the effects of permeability. Taylor’s quality or state of being is expressed as “exhausted” in terms of planning and teaching, albeit “energized” when “you light a candle and see students take interest and actually learn,” this makes it all worthwhile. Lee said, “It does mean extra work but there is hope and satisfaction when even one comes in and it finally clicks.” Pat discussed achievements, how targeted interventions for students who were willing to work were quite amazing and “if only one student hit benchmarks, this was a success.” Taylor, Lee and Pat recognized the difficulties associated with lack of permeability, but when diffusion of substances occurs, student and teacher self-efficacy is influenced.

Another teacher compared permeability and satisfaction with other courses. Alex derived a personal satisfaction with teaching students who are underprepared: “I get a lot of satisfaction out of teaching remedial, more than AP courses, and I feel like I’ve done something good for someone.” Alex indicated greater satisfaction teaching ETC students as the diffusion of substances has a greater impact on cell well-being, more so than students who are characterized as permeable.

Another teacher illustrated the effects of permeability and cell function. Overall, Jamie expressed satisfaction with teaching the course and students who are successful, saying, “it is good to see that some have been successful, gone on to college and not dropped out. It is rewarding to hear from prior students how the writing instruction has really helped them.” Jamie experienced satisfaction when permeability of substances maintain lasting effects on cell functioning.

Another teacher illustrated the effects of permeability when an individual cell or student poses specific challenges. Tracey’s experience planning and teaching an ETC has fulfilled the desire to assist students. Particularly, one student stood out who had a pronounced fear of public speaking. Tracey stepped her through the class presentation assignment, and she provided a “wonderful presentation on the last day of class.” Tracey kept a thank you note from this student, representing what it means to teach. See Tracey’s object (Appendix M). Tracey was clearly determined to build competency and confidence, and sees the ETC as fulfilling personal job satisfaction objectives as well as fulfilling a school objective by cultivating college-ready students.

In sum, when teachers act as agents or catalysts, delivering substances to students, they experience satisfaction when diffusion occurs. The interactions associated with

permeability are admittedly challenging, but result in a pronounced sense of satisfaction. Because teachers derive self-efficacy from student mastery, even the slightest diffusion is rewarding. For some, the efforts to improve permeability and student mastery contribute to their overall job satisfaction, as well as a feeling that they have contributed to student achievement in profound ways.

**Factors of permeability.** Several factors contribute to the speed of flux or permeability of a cell membrane. Size and temperature of matter is most important; smaller particles and heated particles move faster. If substances or matter are compared to instructional materials and methods, then the organization of instruction and the amount of information that is delivered are factors of permeability. Additionally, if materials or substances are interesting, this factor plays a role in permeability. Overall, teachers agree it takes considerably more time to instruct ETC students. Blair said,

I think most things that you can use in ETC class work in other classes too. The texts are different and the way you explain it changes. It takes longer to explain and I have to use more examples. You have to know it's going to take longer but most of the time, I think that you can do the same thing with all kids, just using different texts.

Blair indicated the substance of instruction is the same for all students, prepared and underprepared, but the time to explain and the need for modeling is greater with underprepared.

Another teacher illustrated the effects of small particle size as well as heat, i.e., high interest, in relation to permeability. Tracey admitted that planning takes considerable “time and “energy” and that units and lessons are carefully scaffolded: “We

start everything in baby steps and make it high interest,” incorporating materials that students can easily identify and relate to (e.g., Saturday Night Live, The Simpsons, Steven Colbert, etc.), then move to complicated texts (e.g., Aristotle).

Lee also illustrated the effects of small particle size, permeability and student motivation. Lee said, “It is difficult to bring in new concepts. I have to revisit old concepts repeatedly and do a lot of modeling.” Adding, “They are appreciative of small, manageable assignments that are limited to in-class work” and “I have to accept the class will be schizophrenic and that some changes can be made and some you can’t.” Importantly, “you have to be patient with ETC students; work hard to make them feel like they’ve accomplished something and reinforce it is all about growth, that motivates them.”

In sum, teachers acting as agents or catalysts, delivering substances to students, recognized the importance of small particle size (course content, depth and breadth) and heat (high-interest materials). They also recognized that more time is required for diffusion to occur, addressing students’ zone of proximal development and structuring their movement from dependency to independence. These interactions associated with permeability influence teacher and student self-efficacy, namely, mastery experiences.

**Homeostatic equilibrium.** Homeostatic equilibrium is defined as “The tendency of an organism or a cell to regulate its internal conditions, usually by a system of feedback controls, so as to stabilize health and functioning, regardless of the outside changing conditions” ([www.biology-online.org/dictionary/](http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/)). Teachers agreed that teaching an ETC is about finding a balance. Metaphorically, the ETC is an organism that

requires balance and regulation. Teachers act as agents, balancing external as well as internal conditions to promote well-being.

For some, equilibrium is achieved by regulating course materials and combating low student motivation. Tracey admitted the biggest struggle is motivating students and finding the balance between “rigor and interest” and that senioritis is a hurdle to overcome. Adding, “You have to find things that motivate them, plan and structure the course with senioritis in mind and grapple with how we can plan the course better each year to counter that.” Taylor wondered if assignments were too challenging or not challenging enough and considered possibilities, saying:

I think a lot of them are scared to try because they’re afraid of what their skill level actually is so if they do nothing, they know the score they’re going to get is a failing score. At least, I guess they don’t feel ashamed.

Taylor was unsure if instructional materials would interest and motivate students, recognizing this to be an important aspect of engagement, yet she/he creatively employed various media and activities so those students could make connections, thereby creating a balance of interest with complex texts. For Tracey and Taylor, equilibrium was achieved through balancing the rigor of materials with student conditions, such as low self-efficacy and low motivation, sometimes associated with senioritis. Equilibrium is influenced by external and internal conditions.

For another teacher, equilibrium was achieved by regulating or synthesizing content and courses. Shelby indicated that teaching ETC involves finding a balance, saying, “finding the balance between reading and writing” and finding the balance between ETC and English 12. Adding, “Teaching ETC is finding the best way to take the



English 12 content and weave it together with the ETC content, to make the best experience to build skills, to give them the best of both worlds.” For Shelby, equilibrium is influenced by external conditions.

For other teachers, equilibrium was achieved by regulating student skill levels and course expectations. Jamie said, “It’s been a real challenge for me to balance the needs of higher performers and lower performers.” Making it worse, “the class becomes a dumping ground when students are failing AP; they are bored and don’t want to do the work.” Pat also struggled to balance a variety of factors: various skill levels among students, teaching logic when basic sentence formation and organization skills were needed, reading selections (high interest versus challenging texts), the difficulty of covering everything indicated by low ACT scores and Common Core Standards, and student apathy. Essentially, the goals for the class did not match the reality of the classroom. For Jamie and Pat, equilibrium was influenced by external and internal conditions.

For another teacher, equilibrium was achieved by regulating the internal conditions of the agent. For Jamie, teaching was a sink-or-swim experience and balancing act that required wisdom, a thirst for knowledge and a sense of humor. See Jamie’s Image (Appendix N). In contrast to other teachers, who attributed internal conditions to students, Jamie regulated her/his internal conditions as teacher/agent.

In sum, teachers, acting as agents who regulate equilibrium, encountered a variety of interactions: interactions of course materials and content, interactions of student skill levels and motivation, interactions of course and teacher expectations. Interactions are associated with a variety of internal and external conditions, all requiring balance for

organism and cell well-being. Furthermore, equilibrium is associated with SCT and central themes, including co-construction and zone of proximal development.

Underprepared students require assistance with external mediation, and teachers must select tools and artifacts slightly below students' level of independence. Teachers experienced difficulties providing learning situations that were challenging, yet achievable through student effort. Maintaining equilibrium influences teacher and student self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states.

**Nucleus.** The nucleus is defined as, "The core or the central part around which other parts are grouped or gathered" (<http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/>).

Metaphorically, students and teachers, as a cell, possess a central understanding or nucleus, and other parts or other understandings are centered on this core. Thus, the nucleus controls many functions of the cell. Teachers articulated that student nuclei influence teaching. Teacher nuclei also influence teaching, both positively and negatively. The nucleus is defined as:

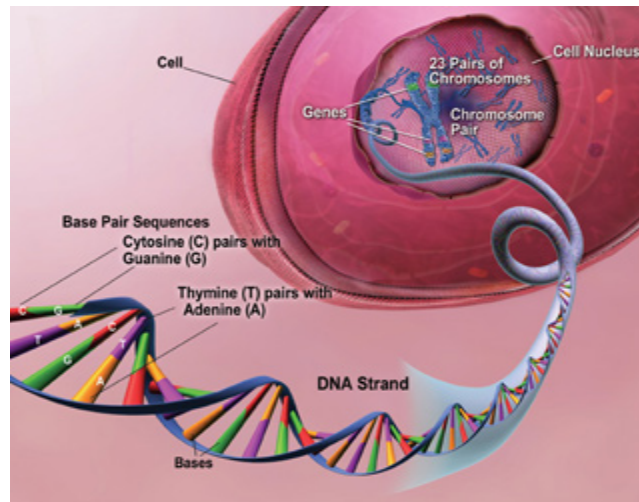
The nucleus houses the majority of genetic material of a cell. The nucleus is the "brain" of the cell and controls all activity within the cell. Using DNA as a blueprint (like the blueprints of a city) the nucleus directs the production of proteins. (<http://biology.unm.edu/>)

This definition illustrates the influence of SCT and CRT and cell nuclei. In other words, the co-construction of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) metaphorically relates to cultural capital and habitus. Imagine a cell nucleus, containing a genetic code, made up of two base strands, cultural capital and habitus, each connected by distinct pairs of in-school

and out-of school sequences, thus forming a blueprint for production. The following figure illustrates this concept and is provided by <http://ocw.mit.edu/>

*Figure 4.2*

*Cell Biology: Structure and Functions of the Nucleus*



(Image courtesy of the [National Institute on Aging/National Institutes of Health](http://www.nia.nih.gov/))

Typically, students carry into the classroom a disposition or nucleus that regulates their function in the classroom. Teachers illustrated the effects of the nucleus as a control of other activities within the cell, whether external or internal. First, Blair admitted, “The students as a whole, because of the low socioeconomic status, struggle with competing interests, and low levels of curiosity and are generally passive.” Second, Morgan said, “Students lack curiosity and willingness to learn” and students are “lazy,” “wounded,” “capable yet apathetic.” Third, Lee said that students “aren’t abstract thinkers and don’t have conversation skills,” “are not readers,” “they lack basic computer skills” and “don’t understand deadlines” or appropriate classroom behaviors. Finally, Pat said, “I don’t want to dash anybody’s dreams, but by the time they get to the second semester of their

senior year and they are still talking about going to college and you have their ACT scores in front of you and know the family situation, you want to try to steer them to something more realistic.” In sum, student nuclei, cultural capital and habitus regulate internal functioning negatively. These comments illustrate the internalization of socially mediated tools and actions, suggesting internal functioning that is counterproductive to student achievement.

Additionally, teachers bring to the classroom a belief system or core that regulates their function in the classroom. Importantly, the teachers’ set of beliefs, established at an early age, continue to influence their teaching experiences, specifically when teaching an ETC. Teachers illustrated the effects of the nucleus as a control of other activities within the cell, whether external or internal. Overall, the teachers’ love for learning and/or content is not something students share; this disconnect manifests as a source of underlying frustration, not only with students, but also with the course itself. First, Kelly saw teachers as individuals with distinct personas and personalities and in her/his case, someone who is very creative. Importantly, Kelly questioned the imposition of College Readiness Standards, saying, “It gets kind of foggy. Some of the standards are not foggy, but some are. They’re making it so that it’s almost scientific how you’re supposed to teach.” Adding, “It’s not realistic and if you try, I think it’s going to take away from something that probably does work and that’s why I’m afraid where education is going, it’s kind of scary.” Kelly saw herself/himself as an artist, a painter first then writer. From an early age, Kelly’s family recognized this aptitude. Consequently, Kelly has struggled with the idea of relinquishing traditional literature and the use of expository text. For Kelly, the importance of creativity as a teacher is challenged by standardization.

Other teachers note the influence of family and educational experiences. Pat's educational background within private Catholic and Christian school settings instilled a robust understanding of grammar, writing and what should be expected from students; this continued to influence her/his expectations and overall dissatisfaction with student performance. Lee, who credited family for her/his love of Liberal Arts and critical thinking abilities, found it difficult to teach underprepared students and readily admitted a preference for teaching AP courses. Taylor's mother instilled a strong work ethic and love of learning and the expectation to see this replicated in students, students who accept challenges and apply higher-order thinking and problem-solving, was unfulfilled. These observations illustrate teachers' internalization of socially mediated tools and actions, suggesting internal functioning that is counterproductive to student achievement. For some, teacher nuclei influenced teacher affective states negatively. Teachers experienced challenges due to their inability to reconcile personal cultural capital and habitus with student cultural capital and habitus.

Alternatively, some family and educational experiences had a positive effect. Tracey discussed the immense value placed on education growing up and the need to advocate for children as well as another family member's issues with substance abuse. Tracey's life experiences offered a unique perspective that continued to influence her/his teaching practices. Another teacher noted the influence of educational experiences. Shelby's involvement in a variety of activities as well as family experiences supported her/his ability to relate to the student population and encourage them to become more involved. Blair's family, meanwhile, valued reading for pleasure and book ownership, a

love for learning and a strong moral sense of right and wrong, all of which pervaded her/his understanding of and interactions with students.

In sum, the influence of cell nuclei (i.e., cultural capital and habitus) associated with creating and teaching an ETC was apparent. Teachers expressed a variety of student core understandings that negatively influence productivity, as well as teacher core understandings that negatively and positively influence productivity thereby, regulating internal functioning. The DNA, or blueprint found in the brain of the cell, the nucleus, is powerful in its composition, suggesting that the consequences of CRT influence student and teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states.

**Mitochondrion.** Mitochondrion as a cell part that:

...has its own genetic material, and is capable of manufacturing its own RNAs and proteins, it is said to be a semi-autonomous, self-reproducing structure. It acts as the “powerhouse of the cell” as it generates most of the cell's supply of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) through the process of cellular respiration.

(<http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary>)

The Mitochondrion converts glucose in order to provide energy to the cell. The experience teaching ETC provided teachers a new understanding of themselves, the students and the course, infusing a new and/or renewed perspective. Metaphorically, the mitochondrion and its ability to provide energy to the cell represents the ETC and the knowledge or awareness teachers gained as a result of teaching the course.

For some, the course provided an awareness of their teaching abilities and a better sense of the profession. First, Tracey realized instructional weaknesses and admitted, “This class definitely put things into perspective about what I didn’t know. I realized

what I wasn't good at and needed to improve upon." Sometimes feeling like "I've been flying by the seat of my pants," Tracey admitted her/his comfort level improved over time and "we are hitting our stride at the third year. We can focus on the purpose on the activities rather than just the product." It appears the time surrounding this experience increased Blair's awareness of differences among students, having previously taught different student populations in AP courses. Morgan had a heightened awareness of the profession and her/his place/contribution within the school; however, she/he remains uncertain about how the course should be offered to students and if her/his ideas/conceptions will be accepted/discussed by school leaders. Third, Taylor's experience has improved her/his self-perceptions of teaching ability; however, her/his expectations of students, as well as the course's intended goals from both the teacher and administrative perspectives, remain unresolved. Through the experience Taylor arrived at a few realizations:

I've learned how to view student writing, after the first year it was easier to flesh out units, and I was underprepared to deal with administrative changes after my first year. I had no idea what I was doing and it took me awhile to catch on. The second year, I felt like I had a better handle on what I needed to be doing, but I think I was distracted a bit by changing administration.

Importantly, Taylor realized she/he is "a better teacher than she/he thought." Finally, Jamie's experience planning and teaching an ETC heightened her/his sense of resilience; reinforcing the ability to handle challenges. The experience provided an understanding of her/his passion for teaching writing and the importance of providing an opportunity to

students who need to catch up. For some, the experience of teaching an ETC led to a new awareness about the profession and their abilities.

Other teachers illustrated a new understanding of instructional approach. First, Shelby's experience changed her/his approach in the classroom. Shelby said, "I feel more like I'm a facilitator and not so much disseminating information. I view my role differently. I'm not building the boat, but sailing it, making sure we are staying on course." Initially, she/he saw her/his role simply as a teacher, to deliver information, but now sees her/his role as more maternal/paternal, saying, "They don't have a parent or adult they can go to and that is a heavy responsibility. When they came to me with personal problems, I realized there is something deeper than just giving information." Shelby sees the role of information dispenser as "old-school" and to be successful "you have to form strong connections with students" and "remain unbiased to labels." Another teacher illustrated an understanding of teaching preferences and adjustments to his/her approach. Lee made adjustments to meet student needs and received satisfaction from teaching the course, but clearly prefers a classroom environment where her/his demeanor/instructional style is more suitable and where students share similar interests, higher-order thinking skills, higher proficiency skills and more enthusiasm for learning. Lee articulated several adjustments she/he has made: "effects of error-laden writing, as a teacher," less sophisticated "vocabulary use in the classroom," "getting them involved in reading and writing on a level they can understand and consider it is not my level," and recognizing that "too much modeling for higher-level students ruins their experience." Adding, "I've had to learn they don't work well with sarcasm and have had to change my tone." Kelly said, "I thought it was exciting because it made so much sense to me and it



was so focused; instead of focusing on content, so much,” but “I am kind of torn, I really love the content.” Alex said, “The ETC was the impetus to provide more contemporary literature to students that aren’t mature enough for traditional literature.” Pat’s experience provided a realization that “my job is to meet them where they are and improve literacy; my purpose is to keep them moving in the direction of becoming more literate.” For some, the experience teaching an ETC led to a new awareness about instructional style, preferences and purpose.

Overall, teachers articulated a new awareness about what it means to teach, specifically to create and teach an ETC. Importantly, the experience creating and teaching an innovative course, often fraught with challenges and uncertainties, provided opportunities for reflection and self-awareness, sometimes in profound ways. The ETC, as a mitochondrion or powerhouse of the cell, generated new understandings, thereby influencing teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states.

In sum, cell functions (i.e., cell membrane and permeability, homeostatic equilibrium, cell nucleus and mitochondrion), as they relate to this study, support the systemic nature of what it means to create and teach an ET course. Interactions of student and teacher characteristics—specifically, the central themes associated with SCT and CRT—influence teacher self-efficacy both positively and negatively. Both student and teacher cultural capital and habitus interact differently among organisms. The well-being of the students/course was largely determined by teachers’ ability to respond to students’ receptivity, arbitrate student core beliefs, and adjust to internal as well as external factors that influence equilibrium. Importantly, teachers gained insights to teaching effectiveness as a result of their participation.

## Summary

Teachers ranged in age and teaching experience, the latter spanning two to 27 years. While age appeared to have little influence on the relative ease or difficulty of creating and teaching an ETC, teaching experience did appear to play somewhat of a role, both positive and negative. Experienced teachers seemed better prepared to handle the behavioral challenges associated with underprepared students and had more resources, which were vital to the planning process. However, experienced teachers encountered conceptual challenges, as did some of the less experienced teachers, causing them to reconcile their understanding of college readiness and the focus of the course. Overall, teacher affinities and personality traits seemed to play a bigger role in the relative ease or difficulty of creating and teaching an ETC course. Additionally, teacher backgrounds varied considerably: some were first-generation college students, but all indicated education was valued and encouraged, whether directly or indirectly. Importantly, family influences continue to play a role in their experiences as a teacher, specifically the experience of creating and teaching an ETC.

To conclude, the thematic representations of what it means to create and teach an ETC—Environmental Issues (EI), Sustenance (S), Freedom (F), and Cell Functions (CF)—illustrate the systemic nature of the phenomenon. The metaphors illustrate the complexity of teacher experiences as they relate to internal conditions of the course, the students and the teachers; not to mention the external circumstances associated with the environment and the school, as well as state and national initiatives targeting college readiness. The metaphorical representations disclose variability; the relationship of student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences grounded in themes

of CRT (EI); teacher self-efficacy, mastery experience, vicarious experiences as well as verbal or social persuasion grounded in the themes of SCT (S); teacher self-efficacy, mastery and physiological emotional states (F), teacher self-efficacy; teacher self-efficacy, mastery affective states grounded in the themes of SCT and CRT (CF).

## Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications and Limitations

### Overview

“We are our own metaphor” (Bateson, 1999) explicates The Gaia Hypothesis, “the hypothesis that the living and nonliving components of earth function as a single system in such a way that the living component regulates and maintains conditions: this system regarded as a single organism” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>). As such, teachers encounter a multitude of components beyond the materiality and space of the classroom environment, in addition to the firmly entrenched perceptual and operational systems of agent and dependent organisms. As researcher, through a series of and recursive sequences of reflections and judgments, *noema*; the *noemata* or many meanings are connected in a way that I come to know not only the parts or aspects of the phenomenon, but also its essence (Moustakas, 1994).

Bateson (1999) said:

All thought relies on metaphor, on ways of noticing similarity so that what has been learned in one situation can be transferred to another. Scientists try to purge metaphor and intuition from their publications, but the speech of scientists is like all human speech and thought, full of metaphors, often unconscious and unexamined. In effect, because knowledge and perception are so dependent on available models, they cannot be changed without a commitment to changing basic patterns of social life. This is the most significant sense in which we are our own metaphor. (p. 15)

This retrospective, transcendental phenomenological study, a metaphorical depiction of what it means to create and teach an ETC is not an absolute truth, but a

suggestion to ponder. Multiple perceptions of reality intertwine to crystalize a common phenomenon, a phenomenon shared by ten teachers, interlaced by a bricoleur. As such, the essence of the phenomenon is circumstantial and partially expressed, but nevertheless provides a glimpse of what it means to be a high school teacher during a time of educational and legislative reform. Importantly, this qualitative study did not initially consider teacher self-efficacy; however, the findings warrant connections to teacher self-efficacy and contribute to a limited literature base, that which usually addresses teacher self-efficacy using quantitative methodologies. Empirical evidence tied to teacher self-efficacy most often utilizes self-reported teacher self-efficacy scales (Friedman, 2003; Friedman & Kass, 2002; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Henson, 2001; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2002)

This research examined the following questions as a result of an ongoing three-year pilot study between a four-year comprehensive University and 16 partnering high schools within an identifiable geographic region: (a) What is the essence of high school teachers' experiences *planning* a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing? Specifically, how do teachers experience planning as a result of collaborative sessions with University English faculty. Additionally, how do teachers experience planning (e.g., course goals, units of study, individual lessons) as result of their individual efforts? (b) What is the essence of the experience of *teaching* a senior-year English Transition course designed to achieve college readiness in reading and writing? The purpose of this study was to capture the essence of teacher experiences and thereby give voice to those involved.

This final chapter will discuss the findings as they relate to each theme, explain the relationship to relevant theories, provide implications for practice and future research, detail the limitations of the study, and conclude with a summary.

## **Discussion**

The insights from this study inform curriculum specialists, policy makers, school leaders and English teachers. My findings provide sound empirical evidence that challenge the way we see traditional schooling, organizational structures/operations, and how teachers approach their role within the classroom. Importantly, this study shows the many influences that surround teacher self-efficacy and measures that can be taken to improve this elusive, yet palpable aspect of teaching.

### **Theme 1**

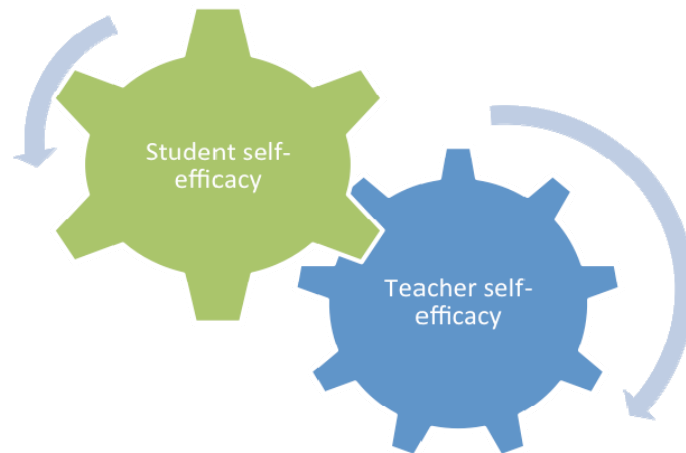
This study shows that environmental issues, climate control (i.e., teachers' perceptions of students' self-efficacy, student perceptions), barometric pressure (i.e., pressures felt by teachers, educational reform, accountability measures and improved graduation rates) and distinct ecozones (i.e., evolutionary process of the course, teacher penchants/expectations, organizational/personnel needs, student demographics, student abilities) played a significant role in teacher experiences, specifically self-efficacy. Teachers derive a sense of self-efficacy or mastery based on student achievement scores and their ability to adapt to environmental conditions, both internal and external.

The current literature base emphasizes the relevancy and relationship of self-efficacy and student performance (Bandura, 1993; Cantrell et al., 2013; Franzblau & Moore, 2001; Green, 2003; Hammond, 2005; Joet et al., 2011; Luszczynska, 2005; Margolis & McCabe, 2006; McCabe, 2006; Pajares, 1996; Pajares & Johnson 1993,

1995; Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010; Sander & Sander, 2006; Usher & Pajares, 2006; Zimmerman et al., 1992). By contrast, there is little evidence that shows how teachers experience and react to this phenomenon within the classroom setting. Students are placed in an ETC if ACT benchmarks for college readiness are not achieved, creating negative perceptions of the course. Although the utility of standardized tests, such as ACT, to predict college preparedness are debatable, nevertheless these instruments are the norm to evaluate student performance and the need for remediation. Additionally, students perceive these test scores to be an indicator of college readiness (Conley, 2011). Admittedly, student self-efficacy is influenced by a variety of factors. While this may be true, consistent with Conely (2011), this study showed the influence of standardized tests and student perceptions, particularly placement in an ETC based on ACT scores, and how teachers respond to classroom climate. This study showed the reciprocal effect of low student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy, specifically mastery experiences. When students perceive extreme weaknesses in ability, teachers expend greater effort and energy to counter perceptions and promote achievement, influencing teacher self-efficacy. Importantly, teachers who understand this dynamic and proactively address student perceptions experience a greater sense of self-efficacy. This study shows the ability to control classroom climate influences teacher self-efficacy.

*Figure 5.1*

*The Relationship of Student Self-efficacy and Teacher Self-efficacy*



The diagram illustrates, within the framework of Self-efficacy Theory, the interactions of teachers and students, a dynamic present within the classroom. Each cog of the diagram represents mastery experiences, the most influential source of self-efficacy, both teacher (based on student achievement) and student self-efficacy (teachers' perceptions of students' self-efficacy associated with achievement). Self-efficacy, or the extent of people's ability to direct the events of their lives, influences cognitive, motivational and affective processes. As such, student and teacher processes are interconnected, represented by the teeth of the cog. The arrows depict the potential movement of processes: when perceptions of student self-efficacy is low, teacher self-efficacy is diminished. Alternatively, teacher self-efficacy improves with improved teacher perceptions of student self-efficacy. These interactions, as they relate to teacher self-efficacy, either realized or discarded, depend upon the individual teacher and his/her



ability to consider this dynamic, which relates to the theme Environmental Issues, climate control (i.e., student perceptions).

Second, our current understanding of student achievement has placed an emphasis on college readiness (ACT, 2011; Armstrong, 2005; Attewell et al., 2006; Bailey et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2005; Garcia, 2011; Prince, 2010; SB1, 2009), historically addressed at the postsecondary level by way of developmental courses and/or summer-bridge programs. Because of recent reform efforts, high schools and high school teachers are summoned to improve standardized test scores that measure college readiness and improve graduation rates; however, there is little evidence that shows how teachers react to these increased pressures. This study showed how and when teachers, balancing against the idea of simply delivering a test-prep course, used accountability measures (particularly student outcomes) as a planning and teaching tool, which bolstered teacher self-efficacy.

Moreover, perceived pressure to improve graduation rates influenced teacher self-efficacy. Teachers grappled with this pressure, whether to adhere to their professional duty and uphold an acceptable standard for college readiness/graduation or concede to the pressure to accept substandard performance, which influenced their physiological states. This study showed that the way in which teachers respond to accountability measures (i.e., standardized tests, student grades, graduation rates) influences their sense of self-efficacy (mastery experiences) and professional morals (burden to graduate/pass students who do not meet course/teacher expectations), relating to the theme Environmental Issue, barometric pressure (i.e., weight exerted by overhead atmosphere, external conditions).

As mentioned earlier, college readiness is difficult to define, including cognitive and non-cognitive facets. ACT recognizes the importance of student motivation (personal characteristics, focus on goal-directed activities), social engagement (involvement in community and extracurricular activities), and self-regulation (thinking processes and emotional responses) as behavioral domains associated with academic achievement. Studies found that students who scored higher in these areas on ACT *Explore* and ACT *Engage* assessments enrolled in postsecondary institutions at a much higher rate than students with lower index scores (ACT, 2013b). Importantly, the findings of this dissertation showed the effect of cognitive and non-cognitive facets, especially their influence upon teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and physiological emotional states. Like ACT (2013b), this study illustrated an example of the effects of behavioral domains and academic achievement, whereby students were placed in a course designed to improve college readiness and teachers commented that instruction was much more than content. This classroom phenomenon related to themes Freedom, fluidity (i.e., responding to student needs, less structured) and Cell Functions, permeability (i.e., student lack of receptivity, motivation) and nucleus (i.e., student cultural capital and habitus, self-regulation). This study showed how teachers respond to low student motivation and self-regulation, an immense challenge to overcome; the manner of response influenced their sense of self-efficacy.

Conley (2011) provided a detailed conception of college readiness and discussed a four-dimension model (key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness). He argued “for a more comprehensive look at what it means to be college ready, a perspective that emphasizes the

interconnectedness of all the dimensions” (Conley, 2011, p. 8). Parallel to Conley’s conception, this study illustrated the presence of a dimensional classroom phenomenon, whereby students demonstrated deficiencies in multiple areas. Teachers involved in this study indicated that students lacked intellectual curiosity, inquisitiveness, problem-solving, the ability to reason and to apply “precision and accuracy” to task completion, all aspects of key cognitive strategies. Teachers commented that their students lacked the background knowledge necessary to achieve college readiness standards for writing and reading and possess misconceptions about their level of mastery in perplexing ways. Grade inflation, course grades and standardized test scores either inflate or deflate student perceptions, all of which are aspects of academic perceptions/behaviors. Teachers involved in this study commented about family influences, students who need parenting and/or lack a contextual knowledge of postsecondary education, aspects of contextual skills and lack of awareness (Conley, 2011).

Consequently, external conditions and student characteristics influence teacher self-efficacy and sometimes challenge their commitment to the profession. To illustrate further, teachers involved in this study were all credentialed, non-emergency, with the exception of one teacher who was working on an alternative credential program. The majority of teachers had a Master’s degree, or were working towards a Master’s degree, which highlights another predictor: teacher attributes. Most expressed satisfaction with their career choice; however, one teacher left the high school setting and entered another job, a workplace readiness organization for high school graduates and/or older learners, but was actively seeking another teaching position. The specifics for leaving her/his position are unclear, but appear to be school related. Another teacher was not sure

whether she/he would remain in their position, expressing frustrations with the profession and job satisfaction. Specifically, in comparison to prior professional vocations, she/he perceived teaching to be much more difficult and the reward (personal and monetary) may not compensate for the pressures. Another teacher indicated a desire to move to the postsecondary setting because of standardization, regulation and difficulties associated with teaching high school students, specifically the disconnect between teacher penchant for literature and higher-order thinking skills and the realities of high school student interests. Although not expressed as a common experience, some teachers admittedly experience a heightened sense of frustration, or barometric pressure. In sum, when teacher self-efficacy is challenged, the willingness to persist is diminished, and like students, teachers self-impose a level of persistence and willingness to undertake challenging tasks (Luszczynska, 2005). Importantly, in spite of educational attainment, previous successes within the classroom and/or successful management of other challenging professional experiences, teachers' beliefs about their capabilities may be a better predictor of what they do, more so than what they are actually capable of doing (Pajares, 1993). This study shows how teachers respond to challenging conditions and contributes to our understanding of teacher attrition—a factor not considered in the original conception of my research, yet a compelling aspect of the profession.

Finally, because a senior-year English Transition course, as described in this study, is a relatively innovative approach to college readiness, few studies examine its place and evolutionary history within high school settings. This study showed the relationship of personnel, organizational, teacher and student outlooks to teacher self-efficacy, relating to the theme of Environmental Issues, ecozones. The current literature

base has focused on underprepared student performance in relation to postsecondary developmental courses and summer bridge programs (Bailey et al., 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2008; Boylan, 1999; Buck, 1985; CCA, 2011; Hoyt, 1999; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Oudenhoven, 2002; Risku, 2002; Santa Rita & Bacote, 1996; Suhr, 1980; Weismman et al., 1997). Prior to this study, there was little evidence that showed how teachers experience and react to organizational structures of similar courses at the high school level. Currently, postsecondary institutions are looking for ways to modify the traditional structure of developmental courses and offer accelerated, alternative means to address underpreparedness in efforts to improve affordability, retention and graduation rates. However, in high school settings, teachers comment that partial-year courses do not provide enough time to cover the skills requisite for college success, adding that a full-year course devoted to this aim is needed as teachers struggle with an array of instructional needs/challenges. This study showed that ETCs, which address both reading and writing, are more successful, in terms of teacher self-efficacy, when scheduled as a full-year course versus a partial year or tri-semester sequence. This finding is associated with the theme Environmental Issues, ecozone which includes several influences including logistical challenges. Interestingly, this study may challenge postsecondary efforts to improve retention and graduation rates by way of accelerated developmental course options.

Teacher experiences, as they operate within a conceptualization of college readiness, illustrate the complexity of teaching underprepared students. This study is significant as it underscores our understanding of the underprepared at the high school level; it corroborates evidence provided by previous studies associated with college

readiness and provides an alternative means of remediation (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Importantly, teachers illustrate the challenges associated with planning and teaching, characterized as “daunting” and “exhausting,” something much more than simply content-driven. The ability to respond to environmental issues, climate control (i.e., teachers’ perceptions of student self-efficacy, student perceptions), barometric pressure (i.e., pressures felt by teachers, educational reform, accountability measures, and improved graduation rates) and distinct ecozones (i.e., evolutionary process of the course, teacher penchants/expectations, organizational/personnel needs, student demographics, student abilities) influences teacher self-efficacy.

## **Theme 2**

Sustenance (i.e., moral support and pedagogical assistance) as it relates to this study is a prominent element of teacher self-efficacy, influencing mastery experience, vicarious experiences as well as verbal or social persuasion, all of which are grounded in SCT. Within educational contexts, SCT is often associated with student performance (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978) and generally associated with individuals (Alfred, 2002; Cole, 1985; Mahn, 1999; McGlenn-Nelson, 2005; Sawyer, 2002; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). This study examined teacher experiences planning and teaching an ETC, by way of intra-school collaborations in the form of a PLC, which address principles of SCT. This study augments and corroborates previous studies that have examined PLC participant perceptions and presence of PLCs, which indicated PLCs are viewed as opportunities to learn from other teachers and have positive effects (Al-Taneiji, 2010; Graham, 2007; Linder et al., 2012; Sigurdardottir, 2010; Thompson et al., 2004). This

study showed the importance teachers place on opportunities to collaborate with peers and the resultant influence upon teacher self-efficacy, relating to theme Sustenance, satiation (i.e., perceived necessity of collegiality, communication and collaboration). Additionally, this study corroborated the importance of support from school leaders and the tendencies for some teachers to preserve autonomy, relating to theme Sustenance, palatability (i.e., perceived reward or benefit of communication and collaboration).

### **Theme 3**

This study showed that Freedom (teacher as boundary to an open-system) which encompasses control (teacher autonomy, self-determination and creativity), chaos (teacher disorder and confusion) and fluidity (teacher responsiveness to student needs and unpredictability), played a significant role in teachers' experiences with creating and teaching an ETC, specifically teacher self-efficacy. Teachers derived a sense of self-efficacy or mastery based on their ability to respond to a new curriculum and student needs. Current studies about the quality of education in the United States have led to a standardized college readiness curriculum, the Common Core Standards for College and Career Readiness, 2010 (Gardner et al., 1983; Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994; No Child Left Behind, 2001; Race to the Top, 2009; PISA, 2009). Importantly, these reports are based on student performance and there is little to no evidence showing how teachers experience and react to this new direction within the classroom setting. This study showed teachers' ability to conform and/or integrate curriculum standards to a newly conceived course, which influences teacher self-efficacy and relates to the theme Freedom.

#### **Theme 4**

This study showed how Cell Functions (student and teacher), as they relate to this study; cell membrane and impermeability (student low motivation, interest/receptivity); homeostatic equilibrium (balancing course materials/content and student motivation/skill levels; balancing expectations and reality); cell nucleus (understanding/reconciliation of student/teacher cultural capital and habitus) contribute to the systemic nature of what it means to create and teach an ET course. Importantly, teacher self-efficacy is influenced by their ability to respond to cellular interactions (i.e., the interaction of students with instruction, the interactions of teacher and student core beliefs).

The current literature base illustrates the relationship of self-efficacy and procrastination task-avoidance in terms of student performance (Ferrari, 2000; Ferraire & Patel, 2004; Ferrari & Diaz-Morales, 2007; Heimerdinger & Hinsz, 2008; Klassen et al., 2008; Madjar et al., 2011; Nasiriyani et al., 2011; Nurmi et al., 2003; Rabin et al., 2011; Schnell et al., 2010; Seo, 2008; Strunk & Steele, 2011; Tan et al., 2008; Wolters, 2003). Moreover, there is little evidence that shows how teachers experience and react to this phenomenon within the classroom setting. Although teachers do not characterize students as using avoidance behaviors referenced in the literature base, they do corroborate that students resist completing tasks, hence impermeability. This study showed the influence of low students' self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy. Importantly, teachers who understand this dynamic and apply teaching strategies and materials that counter this tendency experience a greater sense of self-efficacy. This study showed that the ability to control student permeability influences teacher self-efficacy.



Furthermore, previous studies explain characteristics of students placed in postsecondary developmental courses. The current literature base indicated that a higher percentage of female students (Aud et al., 2011; Bailey et al., 2010; Garcia, 2011; Hiemstra, 2006; Prince, 2010), those coming from a low-income family with lower levels of parental education attainment (Attewell et al., 2006; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Higbee et al., 2003; Kozeracki, 2005; Stein, 2005), students with disabilities (Bangser, 2008) and first-year college students (Jaggers, 2011) tend to be placed in developmental courses. Other factors that contribute to underpreparedness include schooling and teacher attributes (Howell, 2011). The current literature base illustrates the effects of schooling and non-schooling influences of student performance; however, there is little to no evidence showing how teachers respond to these characteristics. This study showed how teachers responded to students from low-income families, a commonality conveyed by teachers and school demographics, and extends our understanding of how student cultural capital and habitus interact with teacher cultural capital and habitus within the classroom.

Additionally, teachers commented that a large number of students in their classrooms would be first-generation college students and received little support from home, emotional and/or academic. It is not clear whether a greater number of female versus male students were enrolled in ETCs; teachers did indicate, though, that some students had learning disabilities and behavior disorders. To illustrate extreme cases, a couple of teachers described students in their classrooms who were in school by court order and/or had documented mental health issues that were difficult to manage. In other cases, learning disabilities were recognized and teachers perceived these to be detrimental to the student's ability to achieve college readiness. I do not thematize these factors,

because they were not expressed as common experiences across participants. These characteristics are grounds for additional research, and in totality reference a variety of external and/or internal influences.

Overall, the findings associated with each theme influenced teacher self-efficacy, either positively or negatively. Each theme and its distinct characteristics allude to and/or can be associated with relevant theoretical perspectives; however, the boundary between student and teacher performance is obscure as much of the literature base focuses on student performance. Nevertheless, this study shows how teacher experiences apply to relevant theory.

The theoretical foundation initially conceived for this study, the relationship of four theoretical concepts and their central tenets, CRT, SCT, PTAT and SE, shape our understanding of underprepared students; thus, allowing us to understand teacher experiences planning and teaching an ET course. The synthesis of these theories can explain students who attain academic achievement, or work counterproductively for others and negate academic achievement. Moreover, when teachers' experiences are examined, these theories interact in similar ways. Overall, this study reflects external and internal conditions associated with planning and teaching an ETC: namely, the relationship of student SE, CRT (student/teacher), SCT (student/teacher) and teacher self-efficacy.

Cultural Reproduction Theory asserts that our educational system is designed to reproduce the values held by dominant classes or individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and the attitudes, beliefs and activities of individuals defined by these class activities are predictors of educational success (Bourdieu, 1977; Shirley, 1986; Shuker,

1981). Teachers commented that their ETC students come from lower SES backgrounds and families do not transmit the cultural capital necessary for academic achievement. Although not explicitly expressed, due to lower SES and the rural region of the study, students and their families are less likely to frequent art galleries, theatres, and museums. As well, parents are believed not to model academic behaviors and/or place little value on reading/education (habitus). Importantly, student cultural capital (related to student SES and family values) and habitus (dispositions cultivated in the home and later refined in school) play a significant role in teacher self-efficacy (see Figure 2.1).

Although teachers recognized the cultural disadvantages that students bring to the classroom, some teachers could not reconcile disconnects between their cultural capital and habitus and student cultural capital and habitus, a source of frustration that mitigated teacher effectiveness and consequently perpetuated the cultural reproduction cycle. For others, this student-teacher dynamic aligned and teachers found ways to build student cultural capital, finding materials that were suitable, connecting to students and modeling academic behaviors in ways that students could relate. One teacher in particular emphasized the importance of extracurricular activities in her/his educational experience and stressed to students the need to become engaged in extracurricular activities. This study showed the interaction of student and teacher cultural capital and how teacher self-efficacy is influenced, either positively or negatively.

*Figure 5.2*

*The Relationship of Cultural Reproduction Theory and Teacher Self-efficacy*



The diagram illustrates, within the framework of Cultural Reproduction Theory, the interactions of teachers and students, a dynamic present within the classroom. Two cogs of the diagram represent the mutual interaction of student and teacher cultural capital and habitus, the arrows suggesting divergence or inconsistency. Together, these interactions, represented by the teeth in the cog, intersect with/influence teacher self-efficacy. If mitigated, teacher self-efficacy improves, suggested by the potential movement of the self-efficacy arrow and the subsequent convergence of student/teacher cultural capital and habitus. These interactions, as they relate to teacher self-efficacy, either realized or discarded, depend upon the individual teacher and/or possible opportunities to consider this dynamic, but nevertheless influence teacher self-efficacy. This study showed how teacher self-efficacy is influenced by interactions of student cultural capital and habitus

and teacher cultural capital and habitus, relating to the theme(s) Environmental Issues, ecozone (i.e., student characteristics, student ability) and Cell Functions, nucleus (i.e., student cultural capital and habitus, teacher cultural capital and habitus).

Sociocultural Theory asserts that learning begins through socially mediated means and is then interpreted by an individual (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Mahn, 1999) and requires guidance by more capable individual(s), providing tools and artifacts, to build mastery/independence with a given concept/task that is challenging (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers commented that students lack communication and socialization skills within their classrooms. In fact, peers who are more capable become bored and restless and pose behavioral challenges. The opportunities to provide collaborative learning opportunities within the classroom, outside of a whole group discussion led by the instructor, is difficult to arrange. Importantly, teachers commented on the importance of providing tools, mediation, modeling, problem-solving, and guidance in small, incremental, manageable chunks that consider student ability and interest. Moving students from dependence to independence occurs at dissimilar rates and can take considerably more time when compared to other classes. This can pose particular challenges for teachers when they experience a wide variety of skill levels among students who lack motivation—a reality that influences teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states (see Figure 2.1). This study showed the interaction of SCT as it pertains to pedagogical practices and teacher efforts to synthesize theory and practice. Whether the application of theory to classroom instruction is a conscious effort remains unclear. Nonetheless, this study showed that teachers encounter challenges when implementing collaborative activities into their instruction and that students require

extensive modeling and careful scaffolding. These findings relate to the themes of Freedom, control (i.e., autonomy, self-determination), fluidity (i.e., responsiveness to student needs) and Cell Functions, homeostatic equilibrium (i.e., balancing course materials/content and student motivation/skill levels; balancing expectations and reality) and nucleus (i.e., student cultural capital and habitus).

The influence of SCT within the classroom is further evidenced by teacher experiences with collaborative activities with other teachers. When teachers are afforded the opportunity to share and collaborate with others who have a common goal or interest, self-efficacy improves, namely, both mastery experiences and affective states. Teachers commented on the value of moral support and useful classroom materials and strategies provided at face-to-face PLC meetings, as well as the importance of support from school leadership to engage in these kinds of activities. It is clear that PLCs are difficult to initiate and sustain, requiring strong support and leadership (Al-Taneiji, 2006; Doolittle et al., 2008; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Garrett, 2010; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Graham, 2007; Hipp et al., 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hord & Tobia, 2012; Nelson, 2008; Richmond & Manokore, 2010; Schmoker, 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). This study suggests that PLCs are effective insofar as teachers' self-efficacy improved by way of ongoing, goal-oriented collaborations with colleagues. Although online Professional Learning Networks offer an alternative, this study suggests the importance of sustained, face-to-face collaborations that provide the type of feedback only nuanced communication can deliver. *Redefining College Readiness* by David Conley illustrates this point.

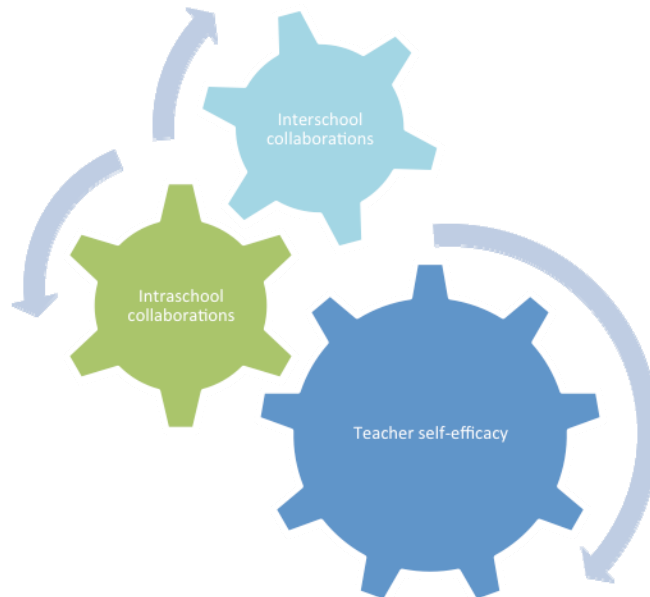
Conley (2011) said, "Teachers must have a reference point for college readiness that extends beyond their own previous experiences in college" (p. 23), indicating the

relevancy of school-University partnerships where professionals at various instructional levels share their student expectations and course materials. Conley suggested that partnerships with colleagues from postsecondary institutions are an effective means for helping students to succeed as long as they are collaborative, collegial and sustained over time. This study reflects the outcomes of an ETC community, similar to other discipline-specific communities that have witnessed transformation success, such as AP communities. PLCs represent a desirable goal as long as the fabrics of communities are interwoven (Conley, 2011).

Skilled implementation of PLCs, both intra and inter school, are increasingly touted as a means for addressing teacher/student success. In this case, intra institution collaborations provide evidence of a PLC model and influence upon teachers, particularly teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences, affective states and vicarious experiences. Importantly, high school teachers comment on the need for more inter and intra school collaborations to reduce isolation and improve alignment of curriculum among other English faculty within their school and to share experiences with faculty in other schools. The following figure illustrates the interaction of intra and inter school collaborations.

*Figure 5.3*

*The Relationship of Sociocultural Theory and Teacher Self-efficacy*



This diagram suggests that formal, structured, intra and inter school collaborations work together to improve teacher self-efficacy. Without these interactions, teacher self-efficacy, within the framework of Sociocultural Theory, is either influenced by unceremonious means of collaboration and/or not addressed. This study showed the interaction of SCT as it pertains to teacher collaborations (PLC), relating to theme Sustenance (i.e., collegiality, communication and collaboration). Particularly, activity that begins on the social plane (interpsychological) and is then interpreted on the individual plane (intrapsychological), or a co-construction of knowledge, is dependent upon both individual and social processes—a central tenet of SCT (Mahn, 1999; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Wertsch, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). This study showed the psychological processes that influence teacher self-efficacy.



Procrastination Task Avoidance theory suggests that, within an academic setting, low self-efficacy is associated with a desire to avoid failure and lower SES results in greater avoidance, with cumulative effects (Ferrari et al., 1995; Nurmi et al., 2003; Schnelle et al., 2010). Teachers expressed low self-efficacy and SES as student characteristics, relating to the themes of Environmental Issues, climate control (i.e., student perceptions), ecozone (i.e., student characteristics, student ability) and Cell Functions, impermeability (i.e., low motivation/interest), nucleus (student cultural capital and habitus). This explains students' lack of receptivity and the challenges teachers face, especially pronounced with high school seniors who have suffered the cumulative effects of poor performance and low self-efficacy.

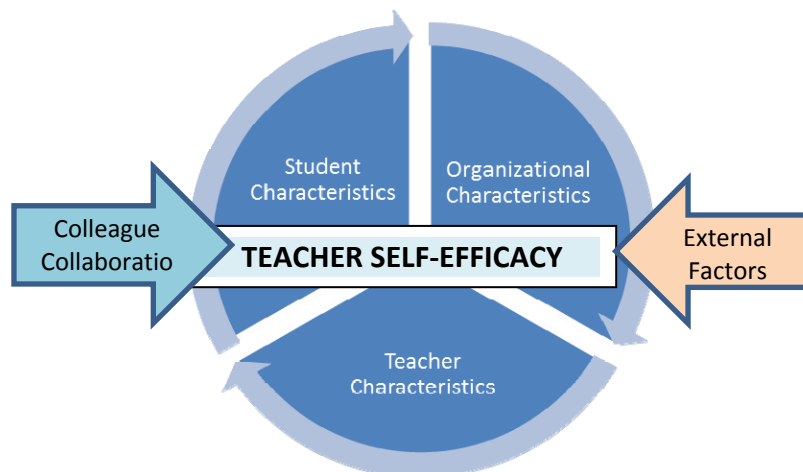
This behavior is particularly troubling and difficult to address. Teachers involved in this study attempted to improve college readiness, but students' skill levels may be far lower than what the objectives of the course entail, compounding task-avoidance behaviors. Procrastination Task-avoidance (per se) was not expressed as a common experience among teachers when planning and teaching an ETC; however, the tendency of students to employ avoidance strategies to cope with low self-efficacy influences teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states (see Figure 2.1). This study showed how low student self-efficacy, motivation and engagement, which suggest procrastination task-avoidance behaviors (failure avoidance), influenced teacher self-efficacy, mastery experiences and affective states, which relates to themes Environmental Issues, climate control (i.e., student perceptions) and Cell Functions, impermeability (i.e., low motivation/interest)task-avoidance. Furthermore, when looking at teachers and the relationship of self-efficacy and procrastination/ task-avoidance behaviors (i.e., avoiding

failure, arousal motives) creating and teaching an ETC; there was no conclusive evidence between task-avoidance behaviors and the course. However, as stated earlier, when teacher self-efficacy was challenged and the willingness to persist was diminished, task-avoidance behaviors were evidenced. One teacher chose to leave his/her current position/school, another voiced a preference for a teaching position at the postsecondary level, and another teacher considered leaving the profession. These extreme examples of task-avoidance (i.e., teacher transition and teacher attrition) suggest an area of further investigation. It is unclear whether the experience of creating and teaching an ETC was the deciding factor; presumably, other influences played a role.

The intersection of these theories and teachers' experiences is complex and further complicated by external factors. The following figure depicts the relationship of theoretical perspectives and the realities of practice when considering teacher experiences and self-efficacy.

*Figure 5.4*

*The Relationship of Influences and Teacher Self-efficacy*



As it relates to this study, teacher self-efficacy is influenced by a variety of factors, including student characteristics (compromised motivation and receptivity, cultural capital and habitus), school structural/organizational characteristics, teacher characteristics (cultural capital and habitus, penchants and perceptions of student self-efficacy), external factors (pressures to improve standardized test scores and graduation rate), and colleague collaborations (sustained collaborations with other high school faculty and university faculty). Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of teacher self-efficacy, specifically how teachers respond to a targeted intervention for college readiness during a period of educational and legislative reform, relating to themes: (1) Environmental Issues (i.e., teachers' perceptions of students' self-efficacy, student perceptions, pressures felt by teachers, educational reform, accountability measures and improved graduation rates, evolutionary process of the course, teacher penchants/expectations, organizational/personnel needs, student demographics); (2) Sustenance (i.e., moral support and pedagogical assistance, perceived necessity of collegiality, communication and collaboration, perceived reward or benefit of communication and collaboration); (3) Freedom (i.e., teacher as boundary to an open-system, teacher autonomy, self-determination and creativity, teacher disorder and confusion, teacher responsiveness to student needs and unpredictability); and (4) Cell Functions (i.e., low student motivation, interest/receptivity, balancing course materials/content and student motivation/skill levels; balancing expectations and reality, understanding/reconciliation of student/teacher cultural capital and habitus).

Additionally, because of recent developments associated with student achievement, this study supports the ongoing need for teachers to address Environmental

Issues, Sustenance, Freedom, and Cell Functions as presented in this study—all influential factors associated with teacher self-efficacy and ultimately student success. Foremost, educational reform and student preparedness continue to shape our educational system and the findings of this study are linked to Common Core State Standards and thematic recommendations put forth by ACT examiners.

As indicated earlier, the number of high school seniors deemed prepared for college, according to American College Testing (ACT), is disappointing. A study indicated only 24% of graduating seniors met all for benchmarks for English, Mathematics, Reading and Science (ACT, 2011). Most recently, “The Condition of College and Career Readiness Report” (ACT, 2013b) shows slight gains: “26% of ACT-tested high school graduates met the ACT college readiness benchmarks in all four subjects, 44% of graduates met the reading benchmark and 64% met the English benchmark” (p. 1). Interestingly, reading benchmark attainment percentages dropped from 53% in 2009 and writing benchmark attainment percentages dropped from 67% in 2009; however, this is attributed to the update of the reading benchmark, from 21 to 22; plus, 22% more students took the ACT. Nonetheless, ACT (2013a; 2013b) recommends policies and practices to increase college readiness. Policy recommendations include: implementing college and career readiness standards, infusing a culture of postsecondary success, ensuring access to rigorous high school courses, supporting early monitoring and intervention, setting clear performance standards, and implementing policies and practices for data-driven decision making. District, school and classroom recommendations include: (1) curriculum and academic goals; (2) staff selection, leadership, and capacity building; (3) instructional tools-programs and strategies; (4)

monitoring performance and progress; and (5) intervention and adjustment (ACT, 2013a, pp. 25-28). These recommendations are particularly interesting as they relate to barometric pressure and sustenance in this study.

Interestingly, teachers involved in this study relied upon Common Core State Standards for College and Career Readiness and district curriculum in various ways to develop an ET course, relating to recommendation one. Teachers involved in this study participated in collaborations as a means for improving instruction; however, teachers recognize that school leadership and collaboration as a primary means for improving instruction is lacking, relating to recommendation 2. Teachers involved in this study were a part of a program or strategy to support academic rigor, relating to recommendation 3. Teachers involved in this study monitored student progress using student performance data, relating to recommendation 4. Finally, teachers involved in this study made adjustments to address student learning needs, relating to recommendation 5. As well, districts and schools, because of their participation, adjusted their curriculum using a targeted intervention to address the learning needs of students and provided “early monitoring of readiness which is associated with increased college success” (ACT, 2013a, p. 13) Later, I suggest interventions that schools can make to address the learning needs of teachers, in relation to recommendations 2 and 5 outlined by ACT (2013b), alongside the implications of this study. I address ACT recommendations as additional evidence to support the findings of this study, in terms of the import of teacher experiences, Environmental Issues, Sustenance, Freedom and Cell Functions. Although this study does not examine student success, it does examine the experiences of teachers

working to improve college readiness, providing new information from those on the ground, where recommendations and reality meet.

This study connects back to what we know about college readiness and students, specifically from teachers' perspectives. Decidedly, developmental education at the postsecondary level has a long history, but until recently, there has been little effort to align P-12 learning with college readiness expectations. Historically, this is a significant period, one of acclimation and standardization, and the consequential effect remains unknown.

In sum, this study validates our understanding of student characteristics, characteristics that predict college readiness. Teachers described low SES, lack of support from home, and poor academic dispositions. The study corroborates current recommendations made to improve college readiness and corroborates a comprehensive definition of college readiness. More importantly, the insights gleaned from this study show the relationship of teachers' perceptions of students' self-efficacy to teacher self-efficacy and how organizational and student characteristics influence teacher self-efficacy. This study's findings will change the future, namely in how policy makers, school leaders and teachers address the concerns/needs of teachers and subsequently the needs of underprepared students. First, policy makers and school leaders will need to find ways to implement and sustain PLCs within the organizational structure of schooling. Second, policy makers and school leaders will need to understand the constraints/challenges associated with teaching underprepared students and find ways to structure schooling in order to meet teacher and student needs. Finally, teachers will need to understand what influences their self-efficacy—in particular, teachers will

understand/begin to reconcile the disparities between student and teacher cultural capital and habitus, examining their personal biases and presuppositions, which continue to influence their experiences in the classroom. We learn from this study how student self-efficacy and/or teachers' perceptions of students' self-efficacy influences teacher self-efficacy, how teachers respond to accountability measures, how teachers respond to colleague collaboration, how teachers respond to curriculum changes, how teachers respond to student characteristics, how teachers respond to personal biases and how teachers respond to a new course. In totality, this study illustrates the complexity of teacher experiences in terms of both external and internal factors.

### **Implications for Practice**

As a result of this study, there are several implications to consider, specifically how teachers can improve classroom experiences and the measures other stakeholders (e.g., principals, district leaders, Universities and policy makers) can address to promote teacher self-efficacy and ultimately student achievement.

First, teachers who work with underprepared students at the senior-year level must understand how personal beliefs and expectations, as well as biases and presuppositions, influence their experience in the classroom. Teacher values and student values are grossly disparate and the tensions created by this dynamic can be difficult to surmount without careful consideration. Cultural capital and habitus are powerful predictors of student success, and in this case, the intersection of these influences between students and teachers is a predictor of teacher self-efficacy.

Second, school leadership must recognize the importance of teacher collaborations and the relationship to teacher self-efficacy. Embracing a PLC model,

providing opportunities for teachers to engage in sustained PD that considers discipline-specific communities, is central to teacher self-efficacy. School leaders must also consider the unique teaching challenges associated with underprepared students and proactively seek teachers who are compatible with student characteristics and their instructional needs, structuring year-long transition courses that provide teachers the instructional time needed to address cognitive and non-cognitive facets. Another consideration is the college and career readiness relationship; the Common Core State Standards integrate both realms and are considered synonymous. However, student skills and goals may dictate differentiation within the school structure, one that enables teachers to address college readiness with those who intend to go to college and career readiness for those that are looking at another path. Smaller, year-long courses provide the organizational structure needed to manage different skill levels and interests, thereby offering teachers more opportunities to arrange cooperative learning situations within the classroom.

Third, Universities should act on the need to create a seamless transition from high school to college and create partnerships with schools/districts within their region. PLCs centered on English faculty concerns, both in University and high school, that respect high school idiosyncrasies and teacher expertise are vital. The goals of this partnership were not compatible with some high school settings; thus, considerations could have been employed early on as possible modifications to accommodate a variety of school settings.

Finally, policy makers should consider revising the Common Core Standards to include goals and measures for academic disposition, a non-cognitive facet of college



readiness. Additionally, this study suggests the importance of an active PLC model within or between entities, and within the context of yearly school operations: a scheme that requires commitment alongside a willingness to revise the school structure/environment and to provide the needed resources to accomplish this aim.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The outcomes of this study suggest further investigation is needed: investigations specific to this school-University partnership and broader investigations that consider a variety of geographic regions and student demographics. The present study revealed the essence of what it means to create and teach an ET course designed to reduce the need for remediation during a time of educational and legislative reform. Considering interview data, it seems that a survey constructed to address the thematic representations (CRT, SCT, PTAT and SE) would provide quantitative data to either support or refute the qualitative findings of this study; partnership participants only form a small sampling frame and all high school teachers form a larger sample frame.

Further, a quantitative analysis of student assessment data across all three years of the program would provide additional empirical evidence of student achievement. More importantly, multiple regression analyses of student scores, teachers, schools, year and the relationship to PLC participation would either refute or support the importance of collaborations and student success. For example, teacher turnover and/or teacher attendance at PLC meetings could be a factor. As stated earlier, more studies are needed to support the effectiveness of PLCs, especially how they work to improve student achievement (Hord, 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Nelson, 2008; Vescio et al., 2008).

Additionally, a long-term, follow-up analysis of ETC participants—to evaluate the status/effect of the course within schools, teacher attrition, and the effects of the school-University partnership—would shed additional light on how teachers/schools respond to an innovative, targeted intervention for college readiness.

Finally, other studies using transcendental phenomenological methods, with teachers engaged in similar activities in a variety of geographical regions, would either support or refute the findings of this study. Interestingly, teachers responded favorably to the opportunity to reflect and discuss their histories and teaching experiences—a valuable exercise for teachers to engage in and researchers to gaze upon.

### **Limitations**

Although this study addresses a specific intervention and teacher self-efficacy, limitations should be considered: namely, the dynamic nature of the interview process and actual experience, the retrospective nature of the research and the possibility of participant lapse in memory, and the nature of the researcher and setting.

First, it is unclear whether interviews elicited comments that were a result of actual recollections of teacher experiences, or whether perceptions/understanding on the behalf of the participants were a result of the interview process. Throughout the interviews, I observed and documented in my field notes teacher expressions and responses during the conversational exchange of the interview process. Teachers appeared to have moments of elucidation, contrary to what they might have known or expressed without the opportunity to discuss their experience. I am uncertain where/when the understanding took place, but I recognize the inter-subjectivity of the

researcher/co-researcher dynamic, the nature of the give-and-take as an aspect of a transcendental phenomenological study.

Additionally, teachers may have encountered lapses in memory; thus, the recalling/retelling of their experience may be flawed. Throughout the interviews, I observed and recorded in my field notes the difficulty some teachers had focusing their responses on experiences associated with teaching and planning an ETC. Some teachers had a tendency to discuss other courses (e.g., sophomore English, freshman English, senior AP, junior or traditional English IV) and many responded to questions about teaching holistically, considering all the courses they teach. I am uncertain whether these tendencies were the result of memory lapse or for other reasons. Regardless, this was a consideration during the analysis phase of my research.

As indicated earlier, participant responses may have been swayed during bracketing exercises and the interpretation of the data may have been influenced by researcher biases. In addition, the researcher's limited experience with a qualitative methodology may have negatively impacted the study. Finally, the distinct geographical region of the study prohibits generalization.

### **Summary**

This study sought to describe the essence of what it meant for 10 teachers to create and teach an ETC during a time of educational and legislative reform. Teachers revealed a host of factors that either positively or negatively influenced their sense of self-efficacy. Through this transcendental phenomenological study, we come to know what it means to be a high school teacher, one who works with underprepared students. As Moustakas (1994) said, "Because all knowledge and experience are connected to

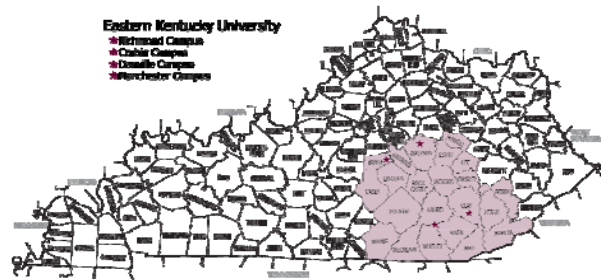
phenomena, things in consciousness that appear in the surrounding world, inevitably a unity must exist between ourselves as knowers and the things or objects that we come to know and depend upon” (p. 44).

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Summer Bridge Programs

Review Aim/Article N=7	Methodology	Theoretical & Conceptual Frameworks	Program Components	Conclusions Development & Success
Study of the 1978 Summer STEP. The Summer Bridge Program at the LSC. Suhr, 1980	Quantitative Descriptive & inferential	None stated 11 references	Residential program For low income/minority students Two Groups (B) average SAT (A) below average SAT 4 week Campus orientation & advising, mathematics writing, reading, study skills & pre chemistry for students who qualified N= 67	Females are more likely to participate Cumulative GPA after 1 year enrollments, no significant difference among groups. SAT scores carry negligible weight in predicting first year college GPA and retention Relationship between retention and SBP is strongest for students with lower academic performance,? four week program too short
Summer Bridge: A residential Learning Experience for High Risk Freshman at the University of California UC, San Diego Buck, 1985	Quantitative, descriptive analysis Qualitative Student Testimonials	Tinto's (1975) Conceptual Model- Social Integration Theory 5 references	Residential Program 4 week- schedule of activities provided Includes lower performing students , but not characterized as "remedial" For low income, educationally and culturally disadvantaged students. Academic (reading, writing, mathematics, science) time management, communication skills, cultural events, "community" Expensive, Longitudinal; N=574	Retention rates improved Demographics and cost were focus of analysis
Whose Mathematics is It, Anyway? Giving Girls a Chance to Take Charge of their Mathematics Learning Morrow & Morrow, 1992	Qualitative Attitudes toward mathematics- Student testimonials	Feminist Framework 32 references	Residential Program 6 week- outlines a sample day Concepts essential for understanding of higher level mathematics/science Pair work & technology Mathematics emphasis for female students, some having poor mathematics grades, some not. Build self-esteem & confidence, "community"; N=100 approximately	Improved attitude toward mathematics
Summer Program for Minority and Low income	Qualitative Attitudinal data Quantitative	None stated 7 references	On campus 6 week For high risk, low income, minority students	Program shows improved persistence rates

## Appendix B: Geographic Service Region of University



### First Year Pilot Schools (2010-2011) Began Collaborations January 2010

4

### Second Year Schools 2011-2012 Began Collaborations January 2011

16

### Third Year Schools 2012-2013

16

## Appendix C: KY-CPE President Letter to Postsecondary Faculty



### Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

**Steven L. Beshear**  
Governor

1024 Capital Center Drive, Suite 320  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601  
Phone: 502-573-1555  
Fax: 502-573-1535  
<http://www.cpe.ky.gov>

**Robert L. King**  
President

September 14, 2009

Dear Kentucky Faculty Members,

Let me first say how pleased I am to have been asked to come to Kentucky to work with all of you and your respective campuses on the goals of postsecondary reform. I have been here for nearly nine months and have visited many of your campuses, and I am impressed with the wide variety of activities occurring for the benefit of your students.

Council staff and I have received a number of questions on the status of the recently enacted Senate Bill 1. I am writing you today in order to explain as much as I can about the ever-evolving landscape of this hallmark piece of legislation.

Senate Bill 1, signed by Governor Beshear on March 26, 2009, revises the assessment and accountability system for P-12 education in Kentucky. It requires a revision of standards to be based on national and international benchmarks in order to increase the rigor and focus the content of P-12 education, increasing the number of students that are college and career ready.

The Bill calls upon the Kentucky Department of Education, in collaboration with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, to plan and implement a comprehensive process for revising the academic content standards. Part of this process includes the development of a unified strategy to reduce college remediation rates and increase graduation rates of postsecondary students with developmental education needs. An outline for that process, including timelines for all activities, has been completed and is being implemented. You may find that outline and further information at:

<http://www.cpe.ky.gov/policies/academicinit/senbill1/>.

The next step, already underway, is the review of current systemwide public postsecondary placement policies in English and mathematics, and, working with institutional faculty members and representatives from the K-12 system, determining whether revisions are needed in those content standards. A statewide reading group, partnering with the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (housed at the University of Kentucky), is reviewing strategies for reading in academic content areas. Assessments to identify those reading skills needed for success in postsecondary introductory reading-intensive courses are being developed. A mathematics group, partnering with the Kentucky Center for Mathematics (housed at Northern Kentucky University), is doing the same. Reading and mathematics are widely acknowledged as the gateways for success in all educational endeavors. The science standards will be reviewed in the very near future as part of the next stage of the process.

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## Appendix D: Professional Education Fellow Proposal

# Regional High school and College Partnership: English Transitions Course

2009

PEF  
Proposal

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Kim Creech

11/4/2009 Recently the Kentucky Council of Postsecondary education created a task force to “construct a comprehensive plan for improving the outcomes of postsecondary developmental education” (<http://cpe.ky.gov/>). Most recently, Robert L. King the KCPE President wrote a letter to Kentucky faculty members on September 14, 2009. He discussed Senate Bill 1 ([www.education.ky.gov/](http://www.education.ky.gov/)) signed by Governor Beshear on March 26, 2009. This Bill requires a “revision of standards” in order to “increase the rigor and focus the content p-12 education, increasing the number of students that are college and career ready”. He later states, “There is a significant need for relevant and focused research that will facilitate and enable our p-12 colleagues to make and sustain the changes needed to achieve the goals of Senate Bill 1, and you as postsecondary faculty are best positioned for this work”. Initiating a regional high school and college partnership that assists teachers and students with college readiness will promote the objectives of state and postsecondary education entities while providing research opportunities to inform future efforts.

English department faculty will work with two local public high schools/ teachers as well as two local Independent school districts/ teachers to develop an English Transitions course. This course will be offered to senior students who have not achieved satisfactory writing ACT scores.

During this three-year project, participants will foster relationships to create a high school composition course that satisfies college readiness standards while considering the professional expertise of high school teachers and their setting. Participants will address formative evaluations and interventions as this project moves forward. Additionally, participants will work towards determining an assessment tool(s) to track student performance during their senior year of participation.

The outcomes of this program will build a personal and professional foothold. Personal satisfaction of knowing that contributions are being made to the development of the citizenry of Kentucky, that students’ will be better prepared to meet the writing challenges of postsecondary education and the workplace. Professional development will result from the relationships formed between college departments and high school personnel enriching the possibilities for continued growth and collaborations. Additionally, opportunities for research may inform the literacy field in terms of composition and High School/College partnerships. Institutionally, this project may reduce the number of students who are required to take developmental composition courses serving both the university and the students.



**Appendix E: Notice of IRB Approval**  
Protocol Number: 11-028

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)/Independent Ethics Committee (IEC)  
Authorization Agreement**

**Name of Institution or Organization Providing IRB Review (Institution/Organization A):**

Eastern Kentucky University  
IRB Registration #: 00002836 Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #, if any: 00003332

**Name of Institution Relying on the Designated IRB (Institution B):**

University of Kentucky  
FWA #: 00005295

The Officials signing below agree that University of Kentucky may rely on the designated IRB for review and continuing oversight of its human subjects research described below:  
(check one)

☐ This agreement applies to all human subjects research covered by Institution B's FWA.

☒ This agreement is limited to the following specific protocol(s):

Name of Research Project: English Transition Course: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of College and Career Readiness

Name of Principal Investigator: Kim Creech

Sponsor or Funding Agency: EKU College of Education Award Number, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

The review performed by the designated IRB will meet the human subject protection requirements of Institution B's OHRP-approved FWA. The IRB at Institution/Organization A will follow written procedures for reporting its findings and actions to appropriate officials at Institution B. Relevant minutes of IRB meetings will be made available to Institution B upon request. Institution B remains responsible for ensuring compliance with the IRB's determinations and with the Terms of its OHRP-approved FWA. This document must be kept on file by both parties and provided to OHRP upon request.

Signature of Signatory Official (Institution/Organization A):

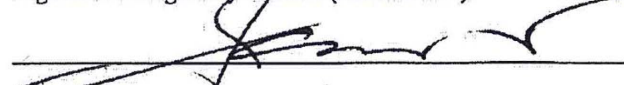


Date: 2/2/2012

Print Full Name: Dr. Gerald J. Pogatshnik Institutional Title: Associate VP for Research

NOTE: The IRB of Institution A may need to be designated on the OHRP-approved FWA for Institution B.

Signature of Signatory Official (Institution B):



Date: 09 Feb 12

Print Full Name: James W. Tracy, Ph.D. Institutional Title: Vice President for Research

## Appendix F: Memorandum of Understanding

*Project focusing on the English transition to college from high school.*

*In order for a district/school to participate in this project, the English teachers, district administrators, school administrators and counselors must all agree to participate.*

### Phase I: Course Preparation

- Teacher representatives from each school participating in the transitional course project attend monthly informational meetings, Feb-May, prior to implementation year and a two-day Professional Development held in June to discuss teaching strategies and assessment tools.
- Teachers bring Student Rosters with ACT data and **p-12 unique student identification** data to the initial meeting of implementation year.

### Phase II: Course Implementation

- Teacher representatives attend monthly meetings, September-May, of implementation year to build and modify course curriculum, organize testing dates and organize school visits to ECU's campus.
- Representatives prepare and discuss student data including teacher analysis, reflect on data and student progress, and modify the course based on data analysis and reflection.
- Schools share relevant data with ECU. ECU collects and analyzes data attending to diligent confidentiality practices.

### Phase III: Course Evaluation

- Teacher representative attend a post semester meeting.
- Representatives prepare, discuss, and share student data including teacher analysis, reflect on data and student progress, and modify course curriculum based on data analysis and reflection. ECU collects data for future dissemination.
- Teachers establish TLLC (transitional literacy learning community) in P-16 SE/SC Council with assistance from ECU.

Name of School District: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of District Administrative Representative Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of High School Principal Date


\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature(s) of English Transition Course Teacher Date


\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature(s) of English Transition Course Teacher Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of ECU Representative Date


\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of ECU Representative Date

## Appendix G: Alex's Image

 : Imagery of my Teaching Career




My first years of teaching remind me of the larval stage. I knew what I wanted to do and be; getting there was a journey.



The Tiger Swallowtail caterpillar has large eyespots that make it look like a large snake-like predator and not a vulnerable larva.

This image and description reminds me of times when I "fake it to make it" in the classroom. Never let them see you sweat.



This image reflects the stage—after 27 years of teaching—that I still daily aspire to. More times than not, I meet my mark. Experience is a great teacher.

But there are a few days when I feel larval, like I don't know anything. There are days when I feel I have to "fake it to make it." And then there are the days that keep me coming back after all this time.

## Appendix H: Lee's Image



## Appendix I: Taylor's Image





## Appendix J: Blair's Image



## **Appendix K: Interview Guide**

### **Interview 1 –Purpose to provide a context of the participant’s experience** 60 minutes

Open by defining the situation for the subject (e.g., purpose, use of sound recorder, confidentiality and data storage)

Bracketing exercise using artifacts and discussion: To begin, I will discuss personal photographs and a picture that I have drawn that represent my history as a teacher and the image I hold of myself as a teacher. This activity helps me to “bracket” my experiences so that I can examine them from a standpoint of conscious observation and that the purpose is to establish a communicative exchange that sets aside prejudgments or biases that could hinder their responses and/or my receptivity.

Take a few minutes to reconstruct/describe your early experiences with family, school and previous jobs. From a standpoint of conscious observation, what prejudgments, prejudices or biases influenced your experiences?

Focusing on your professional experience as a teacher, tell me about your experiences. How did you become interested in teaching? Describe your teaching history/experiences. How did you become interested in teaching students who are at risk or underprepared? From a standpoint of conscious observation, what prejudgments, prejudices or biases influenced your experiences?

What does it mean to you to create an ET course for students who are underprepared? What does it mean to you to collaborate with faculty outside of your school?

Close by asking if the participant would like to add any information or resolve any questions. As a closing task, the participant is asked to bring a photo(s) or draw a picture that represents their history and the image they hold of themselves as a teacher.

### **Interview 2- Focused on details of participant planning and teaching an ET course.**

60 minutes

Open by defining the situation for the subject (e.g., purpose, use of sound recorder, confidentiality and data storage)

Conduct bracketing exercise: To begin, we discuss the photo(s) or picture that represents their past and self-perception. I repeat some of their comments from the previous interview regarding prejudgments, prejudices or biases that may have influenced personal and professional experiences. Ask the participant to remove these mental fabrications to the best of their ability so that their recollection/description is uninhibited by any predispositions.

What does it mean to you to create an ET course for students who are underprepared?  
What does it mean to you to collaborate with faculty outside of your school?

Tell me, in detail, how collaborative sessions with University English faculty and other high school teachers have assisted you with course development?

Tell me about your school. Describe the place where you typically plan for instruction.

What was it like to plan course goals for your ETC? What was it like to plan units of study for your ETC? What was it like to plan individual lesson plans for your ETC? Think about your experience as a teacher and other courses you have taught. Describe any similarities/differences.

Think about your students. Describe them. What is it like to teach an ET course?

Close by asking if the participant would like to add any information or resolve any questions. As a closing task, I ask the participant to bring an object to the final interview that represents their experience planning and teaching an ET course.

### **Interview 3- Reflections on what it means to teach an ET course.** 60 minutes

Open by defining the situation for the subject (e.g., purpose, use of sound recorder, confidentiality and data storage)

Conduct bracketing exercise: To begin, we discuss object that represents their experience planning and teaching an ET course. I repeat some of their descriptions from the previous interview regarding planning as a result of collaboration, as a result of individual efforts and what it is like to teach an ET course. I ask the participant to remove the object or mental fabrications to the best of their ability so that their recollection/description is uninhibited by any predispositions.

Then, I ask, what does it mean to you to create an ET course for students who are underprepared? What does it mean to you to collaborate with faculty outside of your school?

Describe the characteristics of students who are underprepared.

What have been your biggest successes? What have been your biggest challenges?

How has the experience, planning and teaching an ET course, affected your view of yourself as a teacher? Close by asking if the participant would like to add any information or resolve any questions.



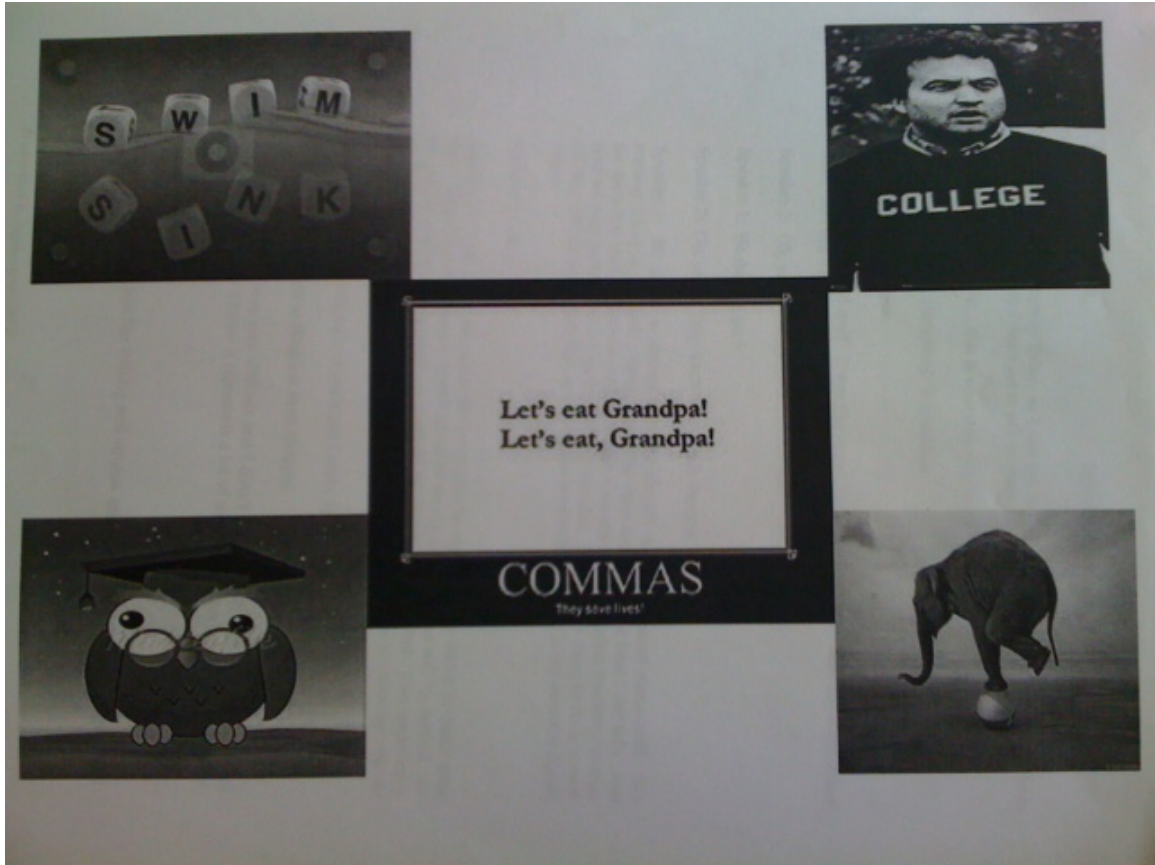
## Appendix L: Pat's Object



### Appendix M: Tracey's Object



## Appendix N: Jamie's Image



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## **Vita**

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Place of Birth: Hamilton, OH

### **EDUCATION:**

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Major: Curriculum & Instruction  
Supporting Areas of Emphasis: p-12 Reading/Writing Specialist
- BA** Northern Kentucky University 1999  
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- BS** Eastern Kentucky University 1986  
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### **ACADEMIC POSITIONS:**

- Assistant Professor**, Eastern Kentucky University.  
2008 - Present  
Developmental Education; Reading & Composition, Department of English & Theatre
- Lecturer**, Eastern Kentucky University.  
2006 - 2008  
Developmental Education; Reading & Composition, Department of English & Theatre
- Adjunct Instructor**, Eastern Kentucky University.  
2004 - 2006  
Developmental Education; Reading & Composition & ELLI; Department of English & Theatre
- Middle Grades Teacher**, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Northern Middle School, Somerset, KY  
2000-2001  
General Science
- Middle Grades Teacher**, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Ockerman Middle School, Florence, KY  
1999-2000  
Physical Science

## **PUBLISHED WORKS:**

### **Refereed Journal Articles:**

**Creech, K. K.**, & Clouse, P. J. (2013). Outcomes of a Partnership for College and Career Readiness and a Senior English Transition Course. *NASSP Bulletin*, 97(4), 314-334.

Cantrell, S. C. (Author), Correll, P. Clouse, P. J., **Creech, K. K.**, Bridges, S., & Owens, D. (2013). Patterns of Self-Efficacy Among College Students in Developmental Reading. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 44(1), 8-34.

### **Non-Refereed Chapters in Books:**

Banasiak, D. E., Blythe, R. R., Carlisle, K., Clement, C. A., Clouse, P. J., Collier, M. W., **Creech, K. K.**, Moore, L., Stevens, S., Watson, S. *Explore, Evaluate, Expand, Express: Academic Success and the ECU Experience* Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University (2011).

## **PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS:**

Alexander, S; **Creech, K. K.**; Clouse, P. J; Milde, R. L., ECU Regional Stewardship: High School English Transitions Course, *National Council of Teachers of English*, Chicago, IL, refereed, presenter. November 19, 2011.

Combs, D. Z; **Creech, K. K.** (Presenter Only), Thomas, R. J. (Presenter Only), Understanding the Mandates of SB 1 on Higher Education, *Faculty Development on SB 1 and Common Core Standards*, Murray State University, Murray, KY, invited, July 12, 2011.

Alexander, S; **Creech, K. K.**; Clouse, P. J; Milde, R. L., ECU Regional Stewardship: High School English Transitions Course, *Kentucky Council of Teachers of English Annual Conference*, KCTE, Covington, KY, refereed, presenter. February 2011.

Alexander, S; **Creech, K. K.**; Clouse, P. J; Milde, R. L., ECU Regional Stewardship: High School English Transitions Course, *KADE Conference*, KY Association of Developmental Education, Elizabethtown Technical and Community College, KY, refereed, P-12 Education, presenter. November 2010.

Alexander, S; **Creech, K. K.**; Clouse, P. J; Milde, R. L., Regional Stewardship: College & Career Readiness, *Unbridled Learning Summit*, Kentucky Department of Education, Louisville, KY, invited, Yes, P-12 Education, Madison. April 10, 2010.

**Creech, K. K.**, Promoting a Sense of Community in the Writing Classroom, *Kentucky Association of Developmental Education*, Pine Mountain State Park, KY, refereed. November 7, 2008.

**Creech, K. K.**, Self-Efficacy and Its Relationship to Composition: A Pedagogical Approach, *College English Association*, College English Association, St. Louis, Missouri, refereed. March 27, 2008.

**Creech, K. K.**, Online Dictionaries and Vocabulary Development, *Kentucky Association of Developmental Education*, Kentucky Association of Developmental Education, Bowling Green Community College of Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY, refereed. November 10, 2007.

### **POSTERS PRESENTED:**

**Creech, K. K.**; Clouse, P. J., Outcomes of an Action Research Project for College and Career Readiness: Senior-year English Transition Course, *American Education Research Association*, San Francisco, CA, refereed, K-12 Education, April, 27, 2013.

Cantrell, S; Clouse, P. J; **Creech, K. K.**; Correll, P; Bridges, S; Owens, D., Patterns of Self-Efficacy Among College Students in Developmental Reading, *American Education Research Association*, Vancouver, Canada, refereed, April 16, 2012.

**Creech, K. K.**, A Univariate and Bivariate Analysis: Faculty Perceptions of Student Computer Mediated Communication, *American Education Research Association*, Denver, CO, refereed. May 3, 2010.

### **PROFESSIONALLY RELATED COMMUNITY SERVICE:**

English Transition Course Partnership with Local High Schools, SB1 Regional Stewardship English Transition Course (ETC) Partnership, **Program Developer and Principle Investigator**, Volunteered. (January 2009 - May 2013).

### **HONORS AND AWARDS**

Doctoral Candidate, University of Kentucky, (2012).

Faculty Professional Development Award, EKU, College of Arts & Sciences, (2012).

Academic Achievement, Phi Lambda Theta International Honor Society, University of Kentucky. (2011).

Junior Faculty Research Award, ECU, College of Arts & Sciences, (2011).

Person on Campus Who has helped the Most in your Success, MAPS Works Student Survey, ECU, (2010).

Graduate Education & Research Scholar, Graduate School, ECU, (2009).

Professional Education Fellow, ECU College of Education, Office of Field Services, Service, Community. (2009).

### **Contracts, Grants and Sponsored Research**

Regional Stewardship: English Transition Course Partnership to Promote College Readiness, Collaborative Center for Literacy Development, University of Kentucky, Funded - (May 16, 2011 - June 30, 2011).