Perceptions on Intelligence and Self-Efficacy: A Qualitative Study of Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses in the Community College

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Dedication

I would like to thank God for the strength and guidance to complete this educational journey. I would also like to dedicate this study to Onyinyechukwu (Onyi), Chinyere (Chi-Chi), and Jackée who motivate me with their intelligence, love, and joy of life. I would like to thank James Myrick, my father, who instilled the importance of love and lifelong learning from the first day of my life. Thank you to pioneer and visionary grandmothers, Ms. Katie Mae and Ms. Mae. I would also like to thank Katrina (Tina), Eugene (Paddi), Alfonso (Devry), friends and relatives for their belief in my abilities to excel in all of my various endeavors over the years.

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Abstract of Dissertation

Perceptions on Intelligence and Self-Efficacy: A Qualitative Study of Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses in the Community College

It is vital for adults to have a college degree to sustain or improve their quality of life (Broad, 2010). It is during the college enrollment process that many adults discover they are underprepared for college-level coursework. Consequently, they are required to enroll in transitional education courses in math, writing, and/or reading to prepare them for college-level coursework (Roueche & Waiwaiole, 2009). The Condition of Education postulates that the need to enroll in transitional education reading courses is the "most serious barrier to degree completion" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 63). This study addressed the deficiencies in the literature by providing an understanding of students' experiences, perceptions of intelligence and self-efficacy, and unique insights while enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college.

A total of 20 participants enrolled in transitional education reading courses in a community college in a greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States were interviewed for this study. The study employed a qualitative methodology which focused on student's voices to gain a better understanding of their educational journey. There was evidence during the study that the educational journey of students was shaped by the recognition of deficiencies in academic performance, but they remained committed to academic improvement. However, their goal development to support long-term career aspirations needed improvement. Also, the students perceived that other students' academic performance was based on internal forces such as academic effort and external forces such as good parenting, inherent intelligence, and no gap before enrollment in

college. Next, students' interactions with various subgroups, including college staff/faculty and extended family, affected their educational journey. There was also evidence that deficiencies in academic advising negatively affected the educational journey of students as they navigated enrollment in multiple transitional education courses. This research provides practitioners and stakeholders with a better understanding of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in a community college and their educational journey to college persistence and completion.

Table of Contents

Dedication iii

Acknowledgements iv

Abstract of Dissertation v

Table of Contents vii

List of Figures xvii

List of Tables xviii

The Introduction to the Study 1

Problem of Practice 3

Role and Scarcity of State Funding 4

College Completion Rates 5

Cost of Transitional Education to Taxpayers and Students 6

Sequence of Transitional Education Courses 8

Research Problem 10

The Influence of Design and Delivery 10

The Influence of the Prominent Theory on College Completion 13

The Over Reliance on Quantitative Research 14

Purpose Statement 17

Exploratory Research Questions 17

Significance of the Study 19

Theoretical Framework 19

Summary of the Methodology 24

Delimitations of the Study 25

Limitations of the Study 26
Subjectivity Statement 26
Assumptions of the Study 28
Definitions of Key Terms 29
Summary 31
Dissertation Overview 32
Chapter II Review of the Literature 33
Focus on Transitional Education 33
Restatement of the Purpose of the Study and its Importance 34
Context of Transitional Education in Higher Education 35
Fundamental Structure 37
Type of credit 38
College placement tests 39
Demographics 40
Enrollment 42
Challenges of Transitional Education 42
Role and Scarcity of State Funding 43
College Completion Rates 45
Costs to Taxpayers and Students 47
Sequence of Courses 49
Influence of Transitional Education Reading Courses 51
Empirical Studies Related to Transitional Education 53
Theory of Identity 59

Identity by Gee 60
Analysis of Gee's theory of identity 61
Theories of Self-efficacy and Intelligence 62
Self-efficacy by Bandura 62
Analysis of Bandura's Self-efficacy by Zimmerman and Pajares 64
Dweck's Self-theories of Intelligence 67
Analysis of Dweck's Self-theories of Intelligence 72
Relationship between the Theoretical Models Reviewed 73
Relevance to the Current Study 76
Research Gap 78
Conclusion 79
Chapter III Methodology 80
Paradigm of Inquiry 80
Rationale for Employing Qualitative Research Design 82
Design of the Semistructured Procedure 83
Part A – Interview protocol 85
Part B – Participant information 86
Part C – Semi-structured interview questions 86
Purpose Statement 86
Research Questions 87
Exploratory Research Questions 87
Statement of Significance 88
Theoretical Perspectives to Drive Research 89

Sampling Plan 91
Site Selection 92
Participant Selection 94
Method of Obtaining Data 95
Data Analysis Methods 96
Coding Method 96
Code book 97
Existing Data 97
Interviews 98
Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software 99
Data Presentation 99
Subjectivity Statement 101
Managing Qualitative Data 102
Trustworthiness and Validity of the Study 102
Human Participants and Ethics Precautions 105
Additional Design Issues 106
Pilot Testing 106
Summary 107
Chapter IV Findings 108
Collecting Data 109
Site Selection 109
Participants 110
Participant Profiles 112

Themes 116
Findings 118
Research Question One: How and in What Ways Do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Describe Their Educational Journey? 118
Students felt the gap before enrollment in college negatively affected the college placement test scores and contributed to transitional challenges 119
Students acknowledged life-changing events resulted in the decision to enroll in college. 121
Students felt their family and faith played a significant role in their support network 123
Students felt advising was not helpful in navigating the complexities of placement in transitional education courses 127
Summary 133
Sub-Research Question A: How and in What Ways Do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive Their Intelligence? 134
Students felt results on reading placement test were not a reflection of their intelligence. 135
Students acknowledged that they were not prepared for college 137

Lack of prior reading comprehension skills negatively affected students' perception of their intelligence 139

Summary 140

Sub-Research Question B: How and in What Ways do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive the Intelligence of Their Classmates and Students Exempt from the Reading Course? 141

Students Perceived the Intelligence of Their Classmates based on Classmates' Effort 142

Students felt that other students exempt from the reading course benefited from good parenting and inherent intelligence 145

Students felt that other students exempt from the reading course put forth more effort and did not have an enrollment gap 147

Summary 150

Sub-Research Question C: How and in What Ways do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive Other's Perceptions of Their Own Intelligence (the college staff, faculty, peers, family, society)? 151

Students felt that their family and peers held a high regard of their intelligence 151

Students felt the faculty held a perception of their intelligence based on their academic interactions 154

Students felt college staff and people in society did not know them well enough to form a perception of their intelligence 156

Summary 159

Sub-Research Question D: How and in What Ways do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive Their Academic Self-Efficacy? 159

Students perceived that they would do better in college if they practiced good study skills and attended class 160

Students perceived that their performance in reading class would help them do better in future college-level courses 163

Students had goals related to their careers that require a college degree 167

Summary 169

Summary 170

Chapter V: Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations 172

Purpose Statement 173

Statement of Significance 173

Revisiting Theoretical Framework 175

Summary of Themes 176

Findings 182

Finding One: The Educational Journey of Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses was Shaped by the Recognition

of Deficiencies in Academic Performance, but Remained Committed to Academic Improvement 183
Finding Two: Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceived that Other Students' Academic Performance was Based on Internal Forces such as Academic Effort and External Forces such as Parenting, Inherent Intelligence, and No Gap Before Enrollment in College 189
Finding Three: Goal Development to Support Long-term Career Aspirations was Lacking Among Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses 193
Finding Four: Interactions with Various Subgroups, including College Staff/Faculty and Extended Family, Affected the Educational Journey of Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses 196
Finding Five: Deficiencies in Academic Advising Practices Negatively Affected the Educational Journey of Transitional Education Reading Students as They Navigated Enrollment in Transitional Education Reading Courses 200
Discussion of Findings 204
Limitations 207
Recommendations for Actions 208
Recommendation One: A Socio-psychological Intervention Activity Should be Implemented Early in the Semester 209

Recommendation Two: There Should be a Guide Sheet in Academic Advising Displaying All the Registration Options and Resources for Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Courses 213
Recommendation Three: The Importance of and Ways to Enhance Faculty Interaction with Students Should be a Part of Professional Development 214
Recommendation Four: Transitional Education Courses Should be Accelerated and Linked to a College Major 215
Recommendation Five: The Test Center Should Offer a Refresher Option for Reading Comprehension 216
Recommendation Six: The Transitional Education Reading Course Should be Worth College Credits..... 218
Recommendation Seven: Omit “Reading” from the Name of the Transitional Education Reading Course and Change “Developmental” to “Transitional” Education Across the College 219
Recommendation Eight: College Staff Should Receive Professional Development Training on the Influence of Their Interactions with Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Courses 220
Recommendations for Future Research 221
Summary and Conclusion 222
References 226
Appendix A: Crosswalk of Research Questions and Interview Questions 237
Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Guide 239
Appendix C: Code Book 242

Appendix D: Research Consent Form 245

Appendix E: E-mail of Invitation to Reading Faculty/Reading Department Chair..... 247

Appendix F: Announcement to the Class……248

Appendix G: Flyer to Prospective Participants..... 249

Appendix H: Reminder E-mail about Interview to Participants..... 250

Appendix I: Follow-up Recruitment E-mail after Class Announcement..... 251

List of Figures

Figure 1. College Completion Rates Within 8.5 Years. 6

Figure 2. Type of Course Credit 39

Figure 3. Number of Transitional Education Reading Courses 50

Figure 4. Sample Socio-Psychological Intervention Activity..... 212

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Crosswalk of Interview Questions and Research Questions..... 84

Table 2. List of Study Participants..... 111

Table 3. List of Research Questions and Themes..... 117

Chapter I

The Introduction to the Study

College completion not only influences the social mobility of graduates, but also is required if the United States is to remain a competitive force in the global, knowledge-based economy. It is becoming increasingly vital for adults to have a college degree to sustain or improve their quality of life (Broad, 2010). Between 2004 and 2014, 25% of all new jobs in America will require a bachelor's degree or higher (Strong American Schools, 2008). According to the Lumina Report (2007), it is challenging for the United States to remain internationally competitive with 54 million working adults without a college degree. President Obama reflected this mandate through his ambitious goal to make the United States the nation with the highest proportion of college graduates by 2020 (Killough, 2009). To reach the goal of attaining a college degree to improve his or her quality of life, an adult must first enroll in college.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicated enrollment growth of 3 million in higher education between 2000 and 2008; continued growth has been projected (Roueche & Waiwaiole, 2009). Many of these adults are enrolling in community colleges, attracted by the institutions' lower tuition and open enrollment policies (Dowd, 2007). Community college enrollment is increasing faster than the rate for four-year colleges and these two-year colleges now enroll 45% of all undergraduate students (Shugart, 2008). Due to the open enrollment policies, community colleges are continuing their historic role of serving nontraditional students including students not prepared for college-level coursework and thus placed in transitional education courses.

As students begin the educational journey to attain a college degree, whether attending a community college or a four-year college or university, they must complete the college enrollment process. As a part of the college enrollment process, many colleges and universities require students to take a college placement exam to determine skill levels in math, writing, and reading. It is during the college enrollment process that many individuals discover they are underprepared for college-level coursework. Consequently, they are required to enroll in transitional education courses in math, writing, or reading to prepare them for college-level coursework (Roueche & Waiwaiole, 2009). More than half of all entering college students test into one or more transitional education courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The placement in transitional education course(s) can influence students' experiences as well as their perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy.

There is a substantial need for transitional education courses and correlative college services. A review of NCES reports from the U.S. Department of Education indicated that 29.5% of first and second year undergraduates at four-year colleges and universities enrolled in at least one transitional education course (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Community colleges, however, have the highest percentage of students enrolled in transitional education courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). In 2007-2008, that percentage rose to 43% (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). Due to the substantial number of students who need the transitional education courses, almost all two-year colleges and a large number of four-year institutions offer these courses. Specifically, to meet the educational needs of these adults, 99% of two-year institutions and about 70% of four-year institutions offer transitional education courses (Boylan &

Bonham, 2007). Due to the prevalence of students enrolled in transitional education courses, this is an area in higher education that should be studied because of its influence on students' experiences and college completion.

This chapter provides the context of the study, which is to describe the major elements of students' experiences in the educational journey of students who enroll in transitional education reading courses. The chapter presents the problem of practice, problem of research, purpose statement, research questions, significance of the study, theoretical framework, summary of the methodology, delimitations, and limitations. The chapter also includes the subjectivity statement, assumptions of the study, and the definition of key terms. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

Problem of Practice

Transitional education and the students who enroll in such courses face several challenges, such as the role and scarcity of state funding (Saxon & Boylan, 2001; Killough, 2009; Collins, 2010), low college completion rates (Killough, 2009), cost to taxpayers and students (Russell, 2008; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010), and sequence of courses (Bailey et al., 2010). For the context of this exploratory study, it was important to examine the challenges that related to the experiences of students enrolled in transitional education courses. State funding plays a role in this group of students' experiences because of its influence on research and priority as a resource in higher education. College completion has an influence in the students' experiences since many enroll in college with the goal of attaining a degree, but do not achieve this goal. The cost to taxpayers and students has an influence on students' experience because it

influences the affordability of attaining a college degree. The sequence of courses play a role in students' experiences because of its influence on the number of classes students have to complete to exit the transitional education courses for advancement to college-level course. The problem of practice influences these challenges for students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Role and Scarcity of State Funding

One of the major roles of state funding in transitional education is to finance research that could improve the quality and effectiveness of the programs (Collins, 2010). Although some states provided state funding for transitional education, others allocate limited or no funding for the purpose of transitional education. For example, some states such as New Jersey, Montana, Florida, and Oregon were considering proposals to require public school systems to pay for any transitional education courses that public school graduates needed in college (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Such concerns reportedly have led some state education departments to take steps to try to reduce or eliminate transitional education course offerings at four-year institutions and to restrict the use of public funds for the courses (Hoyt & Sorenson, 2001; Kozeracki, 2002). A step some states have taken was to require students to complete an academic core curriculum that prepared them for college while they were still in high school to reduce the likelihood of needing transitional education courses in college (Hoyt & Sorensen, 1999; Bettinger & Long, 2008).

Some states, on the other hand, focused on efforts to improve the college completion rate of students who enroll in transitional education courses. For example, in 2004, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board established the Texas Success

Initiative to encourage Texas colleges and universities to improve their transitional education programs for students (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). States and other funding sources have asserted that the college completion rate can be improved for students enrolled in transitional education courses, and demonstrated their support by providing funds for these programs.

The experiences of students enrolled in transitional education is influenced by the role and scarcity of state funding. If states avoid funding for transitional education because it is not perceived as a priority to attaining a college degree, funding for research that could create innovative, effective programs that could be replicated in other institutions would suffer. Additionally, the creation and replication of effective transitional education programs could influence the college completion rates of students who enroll in the transitional education courses.

College Completion Rates

It may be expected that students enrolled in transitional education courses will have low college completion rates because they start college underprepared for college-level coursework. The scope of this challenge was underscored by the Department of Education's estimate that transitional education presents a barrier to college completion for millions of college students (Killough, 2009). The National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) data indicated that 28% of students enrolled in transitional education courses in two-year colleges graduate within 8.5 years—compared to 43% of students without transitional education coursework (see Figure 1; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). There was also a significant gap in the college completion rate of students who enroll in transitional education courses and students without transitional coursework

in four-year colleges and universities. NELS data indicated that 52% of students enrolled in transitional education courses in four-year colleges graduate with bachelor's degrees—compared to 78% of students without transitional education coursework (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006).

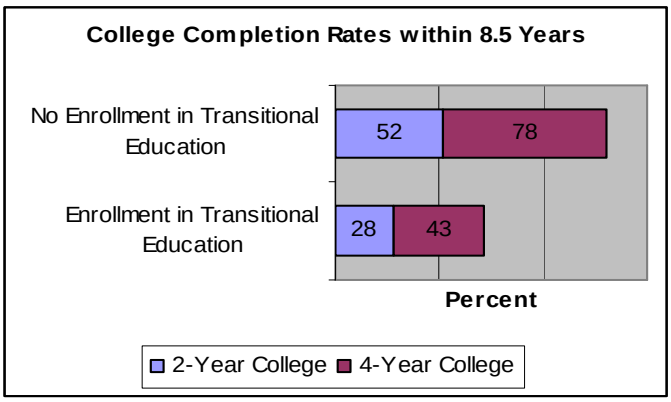

Figure 1. College Completion Rates Within 8.5 Years.

Note: The National Educational Longitudinal Study, known as the NELS:88, is a project of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center on Educational Statistics
SOURCE: Adapted from "New Evidence on College Remediation" by P. Attewell, D. Lavin, T. Domina, and T. Levey, 2006. *Journal of Higher Education, 77*(5), 886-924.

This gap noted in Figure 1 is larger than would be expected from the difference in college preparation alone. Students enrolled in transitional education courses have problems more complex than learning deficits alone (Burley, 2008). Research, such as this exploratory study, examined other factors besides learning deficits that influenced college completion rates for students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Cost of Transitional Education to Taxpayers and Students

Transitional education is costly to taxpayers and students who are paying a second time for basic education skills that are taught in the K-12 school system. The cost of transitional education at four-year public colleges was $435-$543 million (Strong American Schools, 2008). In comparison, the cost of transitional education at a two-year

community college has been estimated at approximately $7 billion (Scott-Clayton, Crosta, & Belfield, 2012). There is controversy over whether or not the taxpayers and students should be held responsible to pay for the costs of transitional education and the state's reaction to the debate.

The K-12 school system is often seen as responsible for teaching basic education skills and therefore should pay the costs of transitional education in higher education. In response to holding the K-12 school system responsible, New Jersey, Montana, Florida, and Oregon, were considering proposals that public K-12 school systems would have to pay for a public school graduate to take transitional education courses while enrolled in college (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Some feel that students are responsible for learning the basic skills that are taught in the K-12 school system. In response to holding students responsible for learning basic education skills while in the K-12 school system, some states were penalizing the students for being underprepared for college. For instance, in Florida, institutions may charge students 15% more per standard credit for enrollment in transitional education courses (Russell, 2008). However, some colleges and the school districts are working together to prepare students for college-level courses rather than blaming each other (Killough, 2009).

However, students not only incur the financial costs of transitional education, they also incur the opportunity cost. There is an opportunity cost when (a) they need transitional education courses but are denied admission at a four-year institution because the college does not offer the courses or (b) they do not pass the sequence of courses in the mandatory time allocated. These students may fail to pursue enrollment or transfer to

another college. McClenney (2009) noted, “If students don’t succeed in developmental education, they simply won’t have the opportunity to succeed anywhere else” (p. 15).

Sequence of Transitional Education Courses

When students test into transitional education reading, writing, or math courses, they may have to take one or more classes in that subject matter. The number of courses in a subject matter that a student must complete in order to exit the transitional education course(s) is considered a sequence. Sequence is defined as the “process that begins with the initial assessment and referral to remediation and ends with the completion of the highest-level developmental course” (Bailey et al., 2010, p. 2). Exiting the sequence of transitional education courses to advance to college-level coursework influences students’ experiences in their educational journey.

Some states are developing innovative programs, such as acceleration, to help students successfully expedite the sequence of transitional education courses. For example, in a community college in Maryland, the accelerated program in writing provided a way for students in transitional education writing courses to also enroll in their required college-level writing courses, such as English 101, in the same semester. This provision offers an avenue for students to expedite their progress to college-level coursework (Adams, Gearhart, Miller, & Roberts, 2009). Frequent communication between the instructors for the transitional education and the college-level courses fosters greater opportunities for student success. These acceleration programs and other similar programs allow students to move quickly through the sequence and advance to a college-level course.

Besides not passing the transitional education course, there were two other reasons why students do not complete the sequence of transitional education courses. A longitudinal study found that students failed to complete the transitional education sequence because: (1) they did not enroll in the first transitional education course or (2) they passed the first course in the sequence, but failed to enroll in the next subsequent course (Bailey et al., 2010). In other words, a student might have passed one transitional education course, such as Math 80, but failed to enroll in the subsequent transitional education Math 81 course. Then, there are students who fail to enroll in any of the required transitional education courses.

In summary, an examination of the research revealed the extent of the problem of practice regarding transitional education. One problem of practice that was revealed is state funding for transitional education has been limited; however, due to the large enrollment of students in transitional education courses and the significant college completion gap, states were increasing their funding for research of innovative programs (Collins, 2010; Roueche & Waiwaiole, 2009). The increased funding could positively influence students' experiences by improvement in the effectiveness and outcomes of transitional education programs. Another problem of practice is an ongoing debate about the cost to taxpayers and students, as well as whether the K-12 school system or students are responsible if students graduate from high school and are underprepared for the rigors of college-level coursework. Rather than a continued debate about who should be held accountable, collaboration between the K-12 school system and higher education would be beneficial in decreasing the need for the courses by increasing the number of students prepared for college-level coursework. Next, sequence of transitional education courses

is more of a gatekeeper than a gateway because the majority of students do not successfully complete the sequence of courses needed to advance to college-level coursework. The review of the empirical literature, which revealed the problem of practice, justified the need for this exploratory study on students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Research Problem

The review of empirical literature revealed several challenges in transitional education, such as the role and scarcity of state funding, low college completion rates, cost to taxpayers and students, and sequence of courses. Additionally, the review of the empirical literature in transitional education revealed the research problems in three areas: course design and delivery, the influence of prominent theory on college completion, and the over reliance on quantitative research as the appropriate approach. This section discusses the studies that demonstrate the influence of course design and delivery, the prominent theory of college completion, and the over reliance of quantitative approaches to address the research problem.

The Influence of Design and Delivery

Most of the research in transitional education has focused exclusively on design and delivery (Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Gonzales, 2010; Collins, 2010). Recent studies of course design and delivery were undertaken with the goal of improving student retention, academic achievement, and college completion. Studies that focus on metacognitive skills, contextualization, multicultural awareness, self-selected readings, and learning communities were undertaken as a means to explore the impact of course design and delivery in transitional education.

Course design and delivery that incorporates metacognitive reading strategies strengthens students' ability to build their reading comprehension skills and apply these strategies in other coursework. For example, a recent case study concluded that metacognitive reading strategies taught in a transitional education reading course resulted in several positive outcomes: increased knowledge of reading strategies, the ability to use the strategies successfully, and understand the value of the strategies (Nash-Ditzel, 2010).

Additionally, course design and delivery that incorporates the contextualization of the course material to students' lives and other college courses cultivates a learning environment in which a student can instantly engage and apply the skills learned rather than hope they can be of value in the future. One study concluded with a recommendation for contextualization in the courses "that quickly connects remedial instruction to a student's occupational interests" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 33). This recommendation was aligned with a pedagogical approach for teaching transitional education courses that required students to transfer the knowledge and strategies acquired in the courses and apply them within other contexts (Voge, 2011). Similarly, another study investigated the relationship between summarization skills (brief presentation of the text and identification of key ideas) and participation in a contextualized literacy intervention in a sample of community college transitional education reading and writing students (Perin, Peverly, Mason, & Vaselewski, 2011). These studies and others found that metacognitive reading strategies and contextualization could allow students in transitional education courses to apply their skills to areas with real-life application and college-level coursework. These methods of instruction vary from the traditional textbook driven and one-dimensional approach to course design and delivery.

In addition to the recent studies on metacognitive reading strategies and contextualization, other research has found that self-selected readings and multicultural awareness promise to advance pedagogy through improvements in course design and delivery (Gay, 2000; Higbee, Schultz, & Goff, 2010; Paulson, 2006). Paulson (2006) reported that self-selected readings at the college level resulted in academic success and promoted reading enjoyment; however, there have been no large, replicated studies focused on the results of this study. Additionally, recent research has documented the importance of multicultural awareness in the advancement of teaching and learning for college-level students; however, an analysis of prominent journals in transitional education over a 10-year period revealed little attention dedicated to students' diverse social identities (Higbee, Schultz, & Goff, 2010). Although studies have demonstrated the value of self-selected readings and multicultural awareness as an important component of course design and delivery for engaging students in their learning, additional attention is needed for widespread implementation.

Some colleges and universities seek to improve their course design and delivery for students enrolled in transitional education by creating learning communities which link the transitional education course with a college-level course. During the spring 2009, a study was conducted of six community colleges (Maryland, Florida, Texas, California, and two in New York) that operated 130 learning communities and enrolled around 3,000 students (Visher, Schneider, Wathington, & Collado, 2010). Although there was consistency in regards to the lead course between the transitional education course and the college-level course and the student cohorts, there was a significant variation in the level of curricular integration. If the two courses have a low level of

curricular integration, then there was an unlikely impact from learning communities on course design and delivery (Visher, Schneider, Wathington, & Collado, 2010).

Course design and delivery has an influence on transitional education as the area of focus for research driven best practices. For example, the state of Kentucky developed a plan to encourage the state's colleges and universities to implement research-based practices in transitional education (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). As Collins (2010) postulated, however, states need to have a broader focus instead of an emphasis on the effects of particular programs for improvement in transitional education.

The Influence of the Prominent Theory on College Completion

The prominent theory of college completion remains Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of student departure. Tinto's theory focuses mainly on traditional, younger students living at residential four-year institutions. Tinto's theory contends that successful academic and social integration leads to college completion is prominent in the field of higher education. For more than 30 years, Tinto's theory has been quoted and reviewed as evidence in approximately 400 citations and mentioned in 170 dissertations (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000); however, the number of older, part-time, and commuter students has increased over time representing a larger proportion as the numbers of traditional college students have decreased (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Because Tinto's theory on student departure focuses mainly on traditional students, researchers Bean and Metzner applied the theory to the growing population of nontraditional students. Bean and Metzner (1985) concluded that social interactions had minimal effects on nontraditional students' dropout decisions, whereas environmental variables, such as

family responsibilities, finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, and opportunity to transfer had greater influence on their attrition.

Tinto's model did not address the differences between White students and students of color. An empirical study was conducted to test Tinto's interactionalist theory of individual student departure and the results found that White students were more likely to participate in decision making, more likely to relate to their peers, but less likely to relate to faculty than nonwhite students (Berger & Braxton, 1998). All three of these factors affect social integration differently between White and nonwhite students and Tinto's academic and social integration do not address these dynamics. None of the prominent research in college completion focused on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. Review of the literature revealed a research gap related to persistence and the educational journey for students enrolled in transitional education courses.

The Over Reliance on Quantitative Research

Most of the research in transitional education has been conducted with a quantitative approach involving large data sets focused on outcomes, such as grades and college completion using variables related to time, gender, ethnicity, enrollment status, and socioeconomic status. Most of the large data sets were generated from National Center for Education Statistics reports. Quantitative researchers define a hierarchy of research in which experimental research designs with random assignment are considered the most rigorous; descriptive research was considered a less rigorous methodology (Collins, 2010). A well-known example of an experimental study with random assignment was an evaluation of a learning communities program at Kingsborough

Community College in Brooklyn, New York to determine the effectiveness of the program with regard to transitional education courses (Scrivener, Bloom, LeBlanc, Paxson, Rouse, & Sommo, 2008). Simply conducting quantitative research about effective or ineffective programs in transitional education, however, does not guide community colleges to better serve the thousands of students currently enrolled in such courses or many future students who will need the courses (Collins, 2010). The hierarchy of research, as defined by quantitative researchers, has had a major influence on the research methodology for transitional education.

Although much of the research in transitional education has focused on outcomes from quantitative viewpoints, there was still much that can be improved. A qualitative approach to research that contributes details and understanding to quantitative findings can strengthen the quality of research in transitional education. As Collins (2010) pointed out, "characteristics like students' determination, grit, and resilience are difficult to measure, but they may influence student outcomes" (p. 6). In other words, students should be given a voice beyond quantitative research with large data sets and related variables. Students enrolled in transitional education courses are the major stakeholders in their educational experiences, but rarely are they asked about their perceptions (Simpson, 2002). This study, grounded in qualitative research, was needed to provide an understanding of students' experiences, their perceptions, and unique insights while enrolled in transitional education reading courses.

In summary, experts and researchers have noted that quality research and data about transitional education are limited (Collins, 2010; Cross, 1976; Green, 2011; Roueche & Snow, 1977; Saxon & Boylan, 2001; Strong American Schools, 2008). The

huge gap in college completion between students enrolled in transitional education courses and students' not needing the courses continues to plague many colleges and universities. Although it was expected that students enrolled in transitional education courses would have lower college completion rates because they enter college underprepared for college-level coursework and face additional obstacles due to this deficit, there were other factors that played a role. Much of the research in transitional education has been from a quantitative-based viewpoint that examined course design and delivery. Thus, the research has not fully taken into account the students' experiences and perceptions, which are gleaned from taking a qualitative viewpoint. Prominent research and theories of student departure, such as Tinto's theory (1975; 1993), focus mainly on traditional-aged students who live in residential facilities at four-year colleges and universities as well as the role of academic and social integration. Although course design and delivery and the theory of college completion are topics of the prominent content literature in transitional education, current research in areas such as transitional education reading courses, perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy are needed to fill the void in the research gap and advance the field.

Transitional education reading courses were chosen for this study because it was an understudied area and its pronounced relevance to students' academic achievement and college completion. The Condition of Education postulates that the need to enroll in transitional education reading courses is the "most serious barrier to degree completion" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 63). Similarly, the Strong American Schools (2008) report indicated that a deficit in reading comprehension skills can have a substantial negative impact on students' college completion goals.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe the educational journey of students who enrolled in transitional education reading courses at a selected community college in the greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States. A key description of students' educational journey was perceptions of their intelligence, the intelligence of others, and how others' (the college, faculty, peers, family, society) perceived their own intelligence because these perceptions were influenced by placement in transitional education reading courses. Another description of students' educational journey was perception of their academic self-efficacy because it influenced their goal of attaining a college degree. The study examined the students through three lenses that were selected to shape the theoretical framework: Gee's (2000) theory on identity, Dweck's (2000) self-theories on intelligence, and Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy. Because there were no exploratory studies on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college, with a focus on their perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy, this exploratory study examined the educational journey of these students.

Exploratory Research Questions

Research questions "explain specifically what your study will attempt to learn or understand" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 67). The research questions operationalized the purpose of the study to explore how study participants made meaning of their educational journey, their perceptions of their intelligence, other students' intelligence, others view of their intelligence, and their academic self-efficacy.

Exploratory Research Questions

The foundation for the exploratory research questions related to prior research regarding Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory and Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence. The two types of theories guided the exploratory research questions. The exploratory research questions form a whole; they were not random questions on the research topic.

1. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey?

The following subset of research questions were important to address in order to understand the main research question as it related to students' educational journey:

a. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional

   education reading courses perceive their intelligence?

b. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive the intelligence of other students?

c. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive other's perceptions of their own intelligence (the college, faculty, peers, family, society)?

d. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their academic self-efficacy?

Significance of the Study

The study makes a substantive contribution to the scholarly research regarding transitional education in several ways. First, this exploratory study investigated the elements of students' experiences in their educational journey while enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. The investigation focused on student's voices rather than large data sets. Second, it provided a better understanding of the students' perceptions on intelligence and academic self-efficacy. A more in-depth understanding of students' perceptions moved beyond focusing on practitioners' course design and delivery. The third substantive contribution was that this exploratory study added basic literature to a needed area in the field of transitional education. This exploratory study focused on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses, a population that was not represented in the prominent theory on college completion. Specifically, the insights gathered through the study are significant for the stakeholders in higher education who have an interest in understanding the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses.

Theoretical Framework

This exploratory study drew on a broad understanding of adult identity, concepts of efficacy, and perceptions of intelligence to structure and focus the inquiry. As Merriam (2009) noted, "a theoretical framework is the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of your study" (p. 66). To better understand the research problem, three theories provided the structure to frame the study with interaction among the theories. Gee's (2000) theory on identity was key in understanding students' identity as adults seeking a college degree and enrollment in a transitional education reading course.

Dweck's (2000) self-theories on intelligence played a major role in understanding students' perspectives and how they perceived the intelligence of students who do not need to enroll in transitional education reading courses. Bandura's (1982) theory on self-efficacy provided the perspectives from which to view student's motivation, achievement, and college completion. Gee's (2000) theory on identity, Dweck's (2000) self-theories on intelligence, and Bandura's (1982) theory on self-efficacy are further discussed to explore the key concepts in the theories and to clarify their application to the research problem.

To better understand the research problem, Gee's (2000) theory on identity was beneficial. Gee defines identity as certain "kinds of person" in a given context with multiple identities connected not to their "internal states" but to their performance in society (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Gee delineated four perspectives on identity: nature, institution, discourse, and affinity. College students enrolled in transitional education reading courses can have an identity based on whether or not they feel they are academically inclined for college, how the institution makes them feel, the discourse they have with other students at the institution, and an allegiance or affinity that they may share with other students in the same course. Thus, Gee's theory on identity provided a view from which to examine the identity of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college.

Two other types of theories guided the interpretation of students' views on intelligence and self-efficacy to better understand the research problem for the study. One type consisted of Dweck's (2000) self-theories on intelligence and the other was Bandura's (1982) theory on self-efficacy. Each theory provided a perspective from which

to examine how students enrolled in transitional education reading courses view their intelligence and the intelligence of others and how they developed goals and subgoals to support their learning.

First, Dweck (2000) explores a framework for understanding intelligence and achievement called self-theories. The self-theories also examines the connection between students' motivation and goals. Dweck's self-theories on intelligence are the "entity-theory" and the "incremental theory."

According to Dweck (2000), self-theories, the "entity-theory" involves people's perception that intelligence is an entity that lies within us and for which there is no change (e.g., one is born with intelligence; p. 2). Students with an entity-theory framework focus on looking smart by meeting easy, low-effort challenges, thus outperforming other students. Students who hold the entity-theory or fixed intelligence are focused more on performance goals. These students want to appear smart to the teacher and their peers.

In contrast, the "incremental theory" outlines that people's perception of intelligence as something that can be increased though one's efforts (e.g., one can work at it; Dweck, 2000, p. 3). Dweck's research found that students with a growth mindset or the incremental framework were galvanized by the concept that they could influence their minds. Students who held the incremental theory focused on learning goals rather than on performance goals. How students who enroll in transitional education reading courses develop their goals and subgoals to support their learning, which could be related to their perceptions on intelligence, was explored in the study.

Second, Bandura (1982) noted that self-efficacy involves organizing cognitive, social, and behavioral skills into courses of action for innumerable purposes. Self-perceptions of self-efficacy strongly influence self-regulatory strategies, motivation, student achievement, and persistence. Bandura supported setting attainable subgoals that can lead to the motivation to attain larger goals in the future. He called the subgoals proximal goals and the large ones distal goals (Bandura, 1982). People with a strong sense of self-efficacy will increase their efforts to overcome difficulties or challenges to reach their goals.

In contrast to *self-efficacy*, Bandura (1982) noted that perceived *self-inefficacy* could elicit futility and despondency. In other words, in the face of difficulties or challenges, people who have a low sense of self-efficacy will decrease their efforts or quit. According to Bandura (1982), a low sense of self-efficacy or a strong sense of self-efficacy is based on four principal sources of information. The four sources of information: performance attainments, vicarious experiences of observing the performances of others, verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences, and physiological states when others judge their capability, strength, and vulnerability (Bandura, 1982). The self-efficacy or self-inefficacy of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses could potentially influence their motivation, efforts, and goal development to support their learning; these variables related to the research problem in the study.

In summary, based upon review of the literature, including empirical research, students enrolled in transitional education courses were faced with many challenges. Their complications were beyond being underprepared for college-level coursework;

therefore, Tinto's theory of student departure was not fully applicable. Also, because this was an exploratory study, there was a need for two types of theories instead of one to fully understand the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses. One type of theory would not suffice in understanding the students' voices as part of their educational journey.

Thus, both Dweck's self-theories on intelligence and Bandura's efficacy theories were necessary to guide the development of the research questions and data analysis for the study. Both types of theories share interactive similarities and differences. Dweck's self-theories on intelligence focus on how the perceptions of intelligence can impact a student's motivation in learning. Bandura's theory on self-efficacy is a key to understanding students' beliefs about their capabilities. Both types of theories interact because perceptions of intelligence and capabilities can benefit or impair students' motivation, efforts, and goal development.

Both types of theories share differences. For example, Dweck's self-theories, narrows the focus to the variables of views of intelligence, while self-efficacy such as Bandura's theory relates more generally to views of capability in areas of cognitive, social, and behavioral skills. Additionally, Dweck's self-theories examine how students' not only view their intelligence, but also their views on the intelligence of others. However, Bandura's theory focuses mainly on the individual. The two types of theories were needed to examine the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses, the students' perceptions of their own intelligence as well as others' intelligence and self-efficacy.

Summary of the Methodology

A clear understanding of the techniques and processes of the methodology was one of the major components of the study. The research design focused on a study approach. The product of the study is a rich description of the experiences of community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses. A community college in a greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States was the site for the study; the community college has a culturally diverse student population. Two courses in sequence, lower level College Reading I and upper level College Reading II, were the transitional education reading courses at the selected site. Based on an assessment test, students can test into College Reading I, pass that course, and then enroll in College Reading II to complete the sequence. Some students test directly into the upper level of the two reading courses, which is College Reading II, pass that course, and exit the sequence of transitional education reading courses. The study participants consisted of 20 students enrolled in College Reading II. The students were not English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students. The courses were traditional transitional education reading courses, in other words, the courses were not accelerated or learning community transitional education reading courses. Evidence was collected from several sources: existing data and semistructured interviews.

The interview included an interview protocol, which was the instrumentation for the study. The goal of the interview was to learn how students enrolled in transitional education reading courses make meaning of their educational journey, how they perceived their intelligence and the intelligence of others, how they perceived other's perceptions of their intelligence, and how they perceived their academic self-efficacy.

Data analysis of the sources of evidence was conducted. Transcripts of the semistructured interviews were coded. The coding was open-coding, and some of the possible codes were based on similarities, differences, frequencies, and causation. Results derived from the existing data and semistructured interviews were presented with particular and general description as well as interpretative commentary. The general description detailed any patterns or themes discovered through review of existing data and semistructured interviews. The results are a rich description built on the analysis of the themes to foster a better understanding of the students.

Delimitations of the Study

The delimitations that add focus to the study are time, location, sample of the study, and its purpose. The study that was conducted occurred over a five-month period covering four semesters; spring, summer session 1, summer session 2, and fall semester in 2013. The exploratory study included only the selected site, a community college in a greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States. Participants in the study included only students who matched the selection criteria established by the researcher: students who are over the age of 18, not ESOL learners, and enrolled in the selected College Reading II classes at the selected site. Finally, the study was delimited by the purpose which is the exploration of how students enrolled in transitional education reading courses make meaning of their educational journey, how they perceive their intelligence, the intelligence of other students, how they perceive that others view their own intelligence, and how they perceive their academic self-efficacy. The delimitations of the study, which were controlled by the researcher, narrowed the scope and focus of the study.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study that were not under the control of the researcher were limitations of the research strategy and issues with sample selection of the study. The qualitative method was selected by the researcher as the research strategy for an optimal exploratory study on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses. However, the research strategy could have potential impact on the findings because it focused on the students' voices rather than the large data sets of a quantitative research strategy and may not provide the results needed to answer the research questions. To overcome this limitation for future research, a mixed method research strategy could be employed. Next, issues with sample selection of the study could have a potential impact on the findings because the interviews were conducted with the students who persisted in the transitional education reading class. To overcome this limitation for future research, interviews should not be conducted with only the students who were persisting in the class. Interviews should also be conducted with study participants who did not complete the class. These limitations, which were not controlled by the researcher, did not affect this exploratory study in important ways.

Subjectivity Statement

To maintain the integrity and validity of the study, it is important to discuss any biases or assumptions that I, as the researcher, may have. It is vital that a qualitative researcher explores any subjectivity as it relates to his or her study. Maxwell (2005) clarified the importance of this key task:

> Qualitative research is not primarily concerned with eliminating *variance* between researchers in the values and expectations they bring to the study, but with understanding how a *particular* researcher's values and expectations influence the

> conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences. (p. 108)

I am an educator and a student. It seems that I have been both for most of my life. I was born in a low-income area in Baltimore, Maryland. Later, my family moved to a middle-income area in the city, which was a big improvement from the previous environment. I received my bachelor's degree in business administration but knew right away that I wanted to teach and work with higher education students. So, within a year of graduating with a bachelor's degree in business administration, I returned to college to attain a master's degree in adult and continuing education.

Since 1993, I have worked with adult learners. At various times during my career of over 20 years, I have taught transitional education reading courses at local community colleges and universities. Therefore, I am very close to my research project. I am currently employed full time as an associate professor in the community college that is the site for the study; however, I will not be the instructor for the participants in the study. I have worked in the community college for almost 8 years.

I can relate to students enrolled in the transitional education reading courses. Although I did not test into transitional education reading courses, I struggled academically with courses that others may have considered very basic such as math. Since the successful completion of the increasingly demanding levels of math courses were a requirement in attaining my college degrees, I had to overcome these challenges by exerting more study time for the math courses, seeking assistance from math tutors, and meeting with math professors during their office hours for tutoring.

Researchers, as Merriam (2009) pointed out, "need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (p. 219). As a

researcher, my closeness to the topic of the study created a bias that was both positive and negative. It was positive because my familiarity with the subject provided insight into some issues related to the research project. On the other hand, was negative because the closeness could have led to strong views on some issues that may not be accurate. As a researcher, my key task was to maintain my subjectivity to uphold the validity and integrity of the study.

Assumptions of the Study

There are several assumptions associated with the study. One assumption was that the study participants were representative of the total population of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. The second assumption was that the study participants could remember and express their ideas into words about their perceptions of intelligence when they first discovered they needed to enroll in the transitional education reading course. The third assumption of the study was that the study participants would answer all the interview questions openly and honestly. Another assumption was that, although participation in the study was voluntary, the students were representative of the research and they shared the vulnerability of not completing the transitional education course. Therefore, it was necessary to have an over sample of study participants. These were assumptions that the researcher had taken for granted in the study.

Definitions of Key Terms

Understanding the appropriate terminology and definitions was paramount to the study. Inconsistency and lack of agreement on the terminology can negatively affect the cohesiveness of research and perceptions of the students who enroll in transitional education reading courses. Once there is an understanding of the terminology, professionals who work with these students can better understand their educational journey, their perceptions of intelligence, and self-efficacy.

The following key terms were used throughout the study:

Acceleration is defined as the reorganization of instruction and curricula in ways that facilitate the completion of educational requirements in an expedited manner (Edgecombe, 2011).

Developmental education, as defined by the National Association for Developmental Education, (NADE) includes programs and services that commonly address academic preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and affective barriers to learning (National Association for Developmental Education, 2009).

College dropout, is any student who enrolls at a college or university one semester but does not enroll the next semester and has not attained a college degree (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Nontraditional student, is older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a

commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors; is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certification, and degrees) (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Remedial describes courses in reading, writing, or mathematics for college-level students lacking those skills necessary to perform college-level work at the level required by the institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003b). In addition, remedial education targets students' cognitive deficits as learners (Arendale, 2005).

Underprepared refers to "a student who, while meeting college admissions requirements, is not yet fully prepared to succeed in one or more college-level courses" (Arendale, 2007, p. 13). Thus, an underprepared student may have excelled in high school but be underprepared for the rigors of college-level material through no fault of their own.

Transitional education, according to Sanchez and Paulson, puts the focus on what the student needs to know about the new academic environment and how to navigate that new environment, instead of focusing on the student's deficits or previous educational experiences (as cited in Paulson & Armstrong, 2010).

Transitional education is a less common and newer term for college students who are not prepared for college-level course work. College students become transitional when they change their "literacy conceptualizations, awareness of the relationship of different types of literacies to the student's academic and other contexts, and increased proficiency in navigating and negotiating literacies for different purposes" (Paulson & Armstrong, 2010, p. 8).

Although the terms developmental education and remedial education are used interchangeably and are more common in higher education, the newer term transitional is the preferred term because it refers to a more comprehensive nature for the services and efforts to assist underprepared college students. Additionally, transitional is a term that does not connote blame for students or their previous high schools or institutions. Also, the president of the community college selected site for this exploratory study recently commented at school-wide faculty meeting that transitional education, rather than developmental education, is becoming a more preferred term.

Summary

There are long-term effects of attending college, such as increased earnings, overall better health, a lower morality rate, smaller families, more efficient consumer choices, and a greater percentage of income in savings (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). There are also positive, intergenerational effects of attending college passed down to the next generation; children of college-educated adults are five times more likely to earn a degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For these and many other reasons, first-generation adults, minority students, and women pursue college degrees not only to better themselves but also to ensure a better future for their children. In the pursuit of a college degree, many adults learn during the enrollment process that they are underprepared for college and need to enroll in transitional education courses.

The review of empirical research revealed several challenges in transitional education, such as the role and scarcity of state funding, low college completion rates, cost to taxpayers and students, and sequence of transitional education courses. The review of the empirical research also revealed several studies from quantitative research

viewpoints that focused on the design and delivery and the prominent theory on college completion. However, there is no literature that examines the major elements of students' experiences for their perceptions of intelligence and self-efficacy for students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. This exploratory study fills the void in the research. The students enrolled in transitional education reading courses were selected because when reading comprehension skills are the core of the problem, the probability of college completion is very low (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). The point for the study to be conducted was to describe the experiences of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college, their perceptions of intelligence, how they perceived that others viewed their own intelligence, and their perceptions of self-efficacy.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter II presents a substantive review of the literature pertinent to the study. The chapter focuses on the theoretical framework for identity, self-efficacy, and perceptions of intelligence. There is particular focus on the fundamental structure, demographics, enrollment, and challenges of transitional education in higher education.

Chapter III describes the research methodology in greater detail as it applies to the exploratory research questions. It includes information about the sample, participants, interview protocol, coding methods, data analysis, and data presentation. The material in the chapter is vital to exploring the meaning of the data. The chapter also includes a section on the consideration of human participants and ethics precautions. Chapter IV presents the findings for the study. Chapter V includes discussion of the meaning of these findings within the context of the literature review and theoretical framework.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

A diversity of students and types of institutions, such as community colleges, online institutions, and public colleges, has enabled higher education to be more accessible and to transition from a service provided exclusively for the elite to mass education (Wechsler, Goodchild, & Eisenmann, 2007). Nevertheless, increased access to higher education does not always equate to preparedness for higher education. Indeed, increased access to higher education has increased also the number of students enrolling in college not prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework. As a result, these students need to enroll in transitional education courses. This exploratory study will examine the educational experiences of students enrolled in transitional education courses, specifically transitional education reading courses, including their views on intelligence and self-efficacy.

Focus on Transitional Education

To meet the needs of mass education for students who are underprepared for college-level coursework, 99% of two-year institutions and about 70% of four-year institutions offer transitional education courses in reading, writing, or math (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). Yet, for many students, enrollment in those courses does not create a gateway to the goal of college completion. In a recent article, Green (2011) reported that only 24% of the students enrolled in three or more transitional education courses completed college. An earlier report, *Diploma to Nowhere*, asserted that "college remediation is one of the most serious education issues facing our country, and policymakers and educators must address it immediately" (Strong American Schools,

2008, p. 6). There is a need to focus on the students who enroll in transitional education courses for a better understanding of the students' experiences and their educational journey.

The review of literature includes investigation of the assertion regarding the significant role of transitional education in the educational journey of students enrolled in such courses. The review presents information about the history, fundamental structure, student demographics, and enrollment statistics of transitional education. Current challenges for transitional education, including the role and scarcity of state funding, college completion rates, costs to taxpayers and students, and the sequence of courses, are reviewed. Empirical studies of transitional education regarding contextualization, effectiveness of the programs, and students' perceptions of academic performance and persistence are reviewed. Additionally, a perception on identity and two theoretical frameworks, self-efficacy and intelligence, are evaluated and synthesized as they relate to the context of the study and shape the guide for the analysis of the data collected.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study and its Importance

Research with a focus on students' voices and perceptions with regard to their enrollment in transitional education courses can facilitate a greater understanding of their educational journey (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005). The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the students' experiences enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college in the greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States. Aspects of the educational journey to be explored are the following: how students perceive their intelligence, the intelligence of other students, perceive other's (the college, faculty, peers, family, society) perceptions of their

own intelligence, and how they perceive their self-efficacy. The study is significant because it will investigate these major elements of the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional reading courses. Also, the exploratory study will provide the much needed literature derived from the students' voices and perceptions regarding the field of transitional education.

Context of Transitional Education in Higher Education

This section includes review of the key components of transitional education and examination of the following topics related to transitional education: its history, its fundamental structure (i.e., type of credit offered and the college placement test), demographics, and enrollment statistics. Also reviewed are the challenges in transitional education such as scarcity of state funding, college completion rates, costs to taxpayers and students, and sequence of courses. The section provides an overview of transitional education from its origin to its current state.

A review of the literature indicates that the need for transitional education for underprepared college students has existed for more than 300 years. During the 1700s, many students were unable to meet the colleges' academic entrance requirements, which necessitated the need for transitional education coursework to increase enrollment and keep colleges open (Green, 2011). As institutions continued to increase their academic entrance requirements, many students seeking a college degree were still underprepared for the rigors of college. Therefore, transitional education coursework evolved into college preparatory departments such as the one created and operated at the University of Wisconsin from 1849 to 1889 (Green, 2011). By the end of the 19th century, 40% of 1st-year college students were enrolled in transitional education programs (Ignash, 1997).

There was an obvious need to address the number of underprepared college students. Green noted,

> By 1892, the concern over underprepared students entering college sparked a report by the Committee of Ten, commissioned by the National Education Association, to call for the strengthening of secondary schools and to allow only fully prepared students to apply to college. (Green, 2011, p. 1)

Although the need for transitional education was viewed as a public concern to be addressed, students were still entering college underprepared at a growing rate during the 20th century (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Transitional education courses were offered at some of the most prestigious colleges and universities; Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Columbia were offering transitional education courses for more than half of their students, who did not meet entrance requirements (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). During the 20th century, the number of unprepared college students continued to grow, but a national push for community colleges to be the conduit to provide services for these students emerged. The President's Commission on Higher Education in 1947 published the Truman Commission report, which created a national mandate for transitional education to be a part of the mission of the community college (Crews & Aragon, 2004). This national mandate ignited an effort that continued until about 30 years ago, to eliminate transitional education or limit the courses to community colleges (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). Then, in an effort to bring transitional education to the forefront in higher education, the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) was created in 1984 (National Association for Developmental Education, 2009). Also, in 1984, the first NCES report on transitional education was published; this report represented a landmark study because, for the first time, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) acknowledged that transitional education was an important

phenomenon in postsecondary education that should be included in its research (Boylan & Bonham, 2007).

In the 21st century, transitional education is often viewed as not being in alignment with the higher status of a college degree. Currently, transitional education is not embraced by all colleges and universities as one of the priorities in services to students. Nevertheless, it has garnered national attention as a result of the need to provide effective services for the continued significant number of unprepared students who enroll in college.

In summary, the history of transitional education spans from the 1700s to the 21st century. As mass education increased the number of college students, it also increased the number of students not prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework and the accompanying need for these students to enroll in transitional education courses. Recently state legislators, policymakers, and higher education executive officers have been recognizing the importance of transitional education and the need to focus serious attention on it to improve success rates in higher education (Boylan & Bonham, 2007). Transitional education is deeply rooted in the history of higher education as well as its future.

Fundamental Structure

Although colleges and universities generally have individualized approaches for transitional education programs designed to fit the needs of their students, a fundamental structure is commonly followed. Among the key aspects of transitional education are its fundamental structure, such as the type of credit that the institution assigns to the courses and the college placement tests utilized for placement in courses. Underlying the

fundamental structure is the genesis of this type of education and its purpose to serve as a gateway to prepare students for college-level coursework.

Type of credit. One fundamental structure is the type of credit the institution assigns to the transitional education courses, which can vary from institutional credit to college-level credit. The most frequent type of credit awarded in 2000 was institutional credit, which counts toward financial aid, campus housing, or full-time student status, but does not count toward degree completion (USDOE, 2003c). Indeed, 76% of the institutions most frequently gave institutional credit for transitional education reading, writing, or mathematics coursework (see Figure 2; USDOE, 2003c). As institutional credit does not count toward degree completion, enrollment in several transitional education courses can cause significant delay in a student's attaining the credits needed to graduate. The type of credit an institution assigns to its transitional education courses often translates to the importance that students place on these courses in their educational journey. If an institution does not offer college credit for its transitional education courses, students may perceive the courses as not valuable in their educational journey.

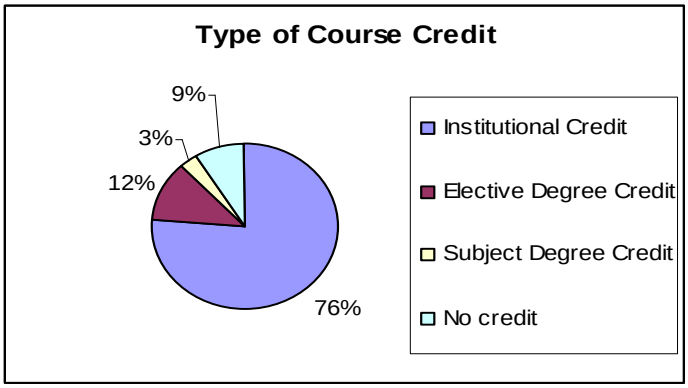

Figure 2. Type of Course Credit

Most frequent type of credit awarded for transitional education courses in 2000, as indicated by degree-granting institutions, by subject area and institutional type.

Note: Data are based on Title IV degree-granting institutions that enrolled freshmen in Fall 2000. Details may not sum to totals because of rounding and not reporting when there are too few cases for a reliable estimate.

Source: Reprinted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, *Survey on Remedial Education in Higher Education Institutions: Fall 2000*.

College placement tests. Another fundamental structure of transitional education programs are the college placement tests administered to determine whether or not a student needs precollege courses. Transitional education courses are deemed necessary based on students' scores on standardized tests, such as the College Board's ACCUPLACER® test or COMPASS® developed by ACT, Inc. The community college selected for this exploratory study utilizes the ACCUPLACER placement tests.

Since 1985, the ACCUPLACER tests, computer-based assessments, have been administered by colleges and universities to test students' academic skills in math, English, and reading (College Board, 2011). More than 1,300 secondary and postsecondary institutions, including the college selected as the site for this study, administer more than 7 million ACCUPLACER tests per year (College Board, 2011).

Such college placement tests are fundamental because the tests determine whether or not a student needs to enroll in precollege-level courses in math, English, or reading; however, students usually take the tests seriously only when they are informed that, based on the assessment test, they need to enroll in one or more transitional education courses. Most institutions have procedures that allow a student to retake the assessment test if the student believes the score was not an accurate reflection of his or her skill level.

In summary, two of the basic components of a transitional education program are (a) the type of credit an institution assigns to the courses and (b) the college placement tests and scores needed to determine if a student is exempt from or required to enroll in such courses. Depending on the institution, there are other components: for example, whether the courses represent a separate department, such as a reading department, or operate within one of the credit-level programs. Aside from the individualized institutional components, the overall mission and purpose of the transitional education program should be clear to the students and should meet the diverse needs of the students in preparing them for the demands of college-level coursework.

Demographics

Transitional education reflects a wide range of demographics in terms of race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status (SES). This diversity in the demographics creates opportunities and sometimes challenges for colleges to accommodate the different needs of their students in providing quality transitional education courses. Although there is a range in the demographics for students, certain populations of students are prominent in transitional education courses.

There is diversity in the race of students who enroll in transitional education courses. In 2007-2008, of the undergraduate students enrolled in transitional education, 45% were African American, 43% were Hispanic or Latino, 38% were Asian, and 31% were White (USDOE, 2011). Although all races are represented, African Americans represent the largest enrollment in transitional education courses.

There is also diversity in the age of students enrolled in transitional education courses; however, studies have indicated that the majority of transitional education students are 20 years old or older, returnees, or delayed entrants to college (Attewell et al., 2006; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). As most of the students in transitional education courses are older students, lower scores on the assessment tests could be the result of students' being away from a regular, ongoing academic learning environment.

Student enrollment in transitional education courses is not restricted to one SES. For instance, Attewell et al. (2006) reported that students from families in the lowest quartile SES were 52% more likely to undertake transitional education coursework; however, they also reported that nearly 24% of the students from the highest quartile SES families also enrolled in transitional education courses in college. Thus, students from both the lowest and highest quartiles of SES enroll in transitional education courses.

In summary, the majority of students enrolled in transitional education courses are racial minorities, specifically African Americans and Hispanic or Latino (USDOE, 2009a). The majority of the students enrolled in transitional education courses are nontraditional older students (Attewell et al., 2006; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Also, the majority of the students enrolled in transitional education courses are from a lower SES

(Attewell et al., 2006). Thus, it is imperative for colleges and universities to provide comprehensive transitional education programs to fit the needs of this diverse group.

Enrollment

Presently, underprepared students maintain significant enrollment in higher education. The percentage of 1st- and 2nd-year undergraduates at four-year colleges taking at least one transitional education course was 29.5% in 2008 (USDOE, 2009b). In two-year colleges, 43% of the 1st- and 2nd-year students were taking at least one transitional education course (USDOE, 2009b). The estimate is higher for students attending community colleges; it has been estimated that 60% of students enrolled in community colleges are required to take at least one transitional education course (Gonzalez, 2010).

In summary, significant numbers of students enroll in transitional education courses. Although the course enrollees are diverse, the largest population of students consists of African American, nontraditional, lower SES students, the majority of whom attend two-year colleges. To address the demographic diversity of the students, some institutions offer staff development in cultural responsive pedagogy, reading in context, and financial literacy in the curriculum. Ideally, after successful completion of the transitional education courses, students should be prepared to meet the demands of college-level coursework.

Challenges of Transitional Education

Because of the high enrollment of students in transitional education courses, the demographics of the students, and the fundamental structure of such courses, transitional education faces numerous challenges. Some of the challenges include the role and

scarcity of state funding, the low college-completion rates, costs to taxpayers and students, and the sequence of the courses. These challenges relate to the students' educational experiences because of the influence on the academic achievement and college completion of students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Role and Scarcity of State Funding

One challenge area relates to the role and scarcity of state funding. More than 30 years ago, legislators and stakeholders did not provide strong financial support for extensive research in transitional education (Cross, 1976; Roueche & Snow, 1977). In 1990, the first National Study of Developmental Education, funded by the Exxon Education Foundation and conducted by the Center for Developmental Education, gathered data from 5,000 students at 120 colleges and universities and "provided empirical data to validate practices" that contributed to the field of transitional education (Boylan & Bonham, 2007, p. 3). These data are evidence that, by 1990, some states did not believe transitional education courses were effective and therefore limited or did not fund the programs, whereas other states accepted responsibility to provide funding for transitional education.

Some states have not considered it their role to fund transitional educational because it has not been effective in improving college completion rates. As Julie Davis Bell, education-program director for the National Conference of State Legislatures pointed out, transitional education is costly to the state, and students enrolled in the courses have low completion rates (Killough, 2009). As a result, some states are implementing policies that restrict, discourage, or eliminate transitional education. Transitional education in four-year colleges is prevented or discouraged in at least 10

states (Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, New Mexico, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia) (Russell, 2008). Further, in California, a policy was implemented in 1999 that gave students one year to complete the transitional education program at four-year colleges; if a student did not complete the sequence, he or she would no longer be enrolled and would be referred to a two-year college (Russell, 2008). The four-year colleges in Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah do not receive state funding for transitional education (Russell, 2008). On the other hand, some states such as Florida provide generous funding; in Florida, "one-half of the cost of developmental education programs…is funded by the state at an annual total exceeding $100 million" (Gallard, Albritton, & Morgan, 2010, p. 10).

Several states have realized the importance of funding transitional education at all levels of higher education. For instance, the Texas legislature has appropriated $5 million, distributed over two years, for six colleges to redesign their transitional education programs (Collins, 2010). Nevertheless, some states still believe it should be within the mission of the community colleges to provide these services. California, encouraging students underprepared for college to enroll in transitional education courses at a community college, has set up transfer agreements so that students can be enrolled concurrently at the University of California or California State University and at a community college (Melguizo, Hagedorn, & Cypers, 2008). Aside from the debate regarding which type of higher education institutions should provide transitional education programs, some philanthropic organizations, realizing the influence of transitional education programs on students' experiences, are providing financial support. In 2010, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donated $110 million to work with

colleges and other stakeholders to develop innovative, groundbreaking models in transitional education that could be replicated in other programs and states (Gonzales, 2010).

College Completion Rates

Another challenge is the significant number of students enrolled in transitional education courses that do not complete college. Indeed, the Obama administration has increased its effort to improve transitional education because it views transitional education as one of the main barriers to millions of students' attaining college degrees (Killough, 2009). Of the 60% of community college students who enroll in at least one transitional education course, only 25% earn a degree within eight years (Gonzalez, 2010). In seeking an understanding of student departure, Tinto's (1975) model of student departure is often viewed as a prominent theory in higher education.

Tinto's (1975) model of student departure focused on attrition at residential institutions and emphasized social integration (e.g., shared values and friendship support) rather than the external environment; however, most of the students enrolled in transitional education courses are nontraditional students at a two-year college. Thus, to understand student departure for students enrolled in transitional education courses, the focus should be on nontraditional, commuter students at two-year colleges. The numbers of nontraditional college students have increased significantly on college campuses. The numbers of older, part-time, and commuter students have increased as the numbers of traditional college students have decreased (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

The model for attrition of nontraditional students, developed by Bean and Metzner (1985), is based primarily on four sets of variables. The first set of variables

includes the background and defining variables (age, enrollment status, residence, educational goals, high school performance, ethnicity, and gender). The second type of variables includes academic variables (study habits, academic advising, absenteeism, major certainty, and course availability). The third set of variables includes environmental variables (finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer). Variables in the last set are related to social integration (which can be measured by the degree of participation in extracurricular activities, peer friendships on campus, and relationships with instructors outside class) (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The range of the variables is important in discussing attrition for students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Bean and Metzner's (1985) model shares many variables that are similar to Tinto's (1975) model; however, the content differs. In Tinto's model of attrition, social interactions with other elements of the campus community such as the faculty, students, and extracurricular activities are paramount. Tinto's model of attrition also focuses on traditional students who reside on campus. Bean and Metzner concluded that for nontraditional commuter students, social integration had minimal effect on students' dropout decisions whereas other environmental variables such as family responsibilities, finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, and opportunity to transfer had more influence on attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985). For nontraditional students, the gap between graduation from high school and college enrollment are usually spent juggling multiple roles such as a "worker, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver, and community member" (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26). For nontraditional students, juggling multiple roles may create additional challenges that are not faced by traditional students. Juggling

multiple roles and then adding another role as a college student often present challenges "in students' allocation of time for both academic study and participation in campus-based organizations and activities" (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26). Thus, Bean and Metzner's theory on student departure for nontraditional commuter students is more aligned to the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in comparison to Tinto's model of student departure.

Costs to Taxpayers and Students

Another challenge is noted in the costs to taxpayers and students to provide the transitional education courses. There are significant costs in providing transitional education courses in public two-year and four-year colleges and universities. It has been estimated that $7 billion is spent annually on transitional education in public two-year colleges (Scott-Clayton, Crosta & Belfield, 2012). The cost at four-year colleges and universities is significantly lower; in four-year colleges and universities, the cost of transitional education is between $435 and $543 million (Roueche & Waiwaiole, 2009).

Although transitional education is costly, the estimated cost is still a conservative figure because of the lack of extensive, universal tracking as well as the inaccurate perspective held by some colleges that acknowledging the existence of such courses could damage their academic reputation. Transitional education was costly to taxpayers even 14 years ago, when researchers Breneman and Haarlow (1998) estimated the cost to be more than $1 billion a year. Breneman and Haarlow's estimate was conservative because it did not include the costs of transitional education at private colleges and universities (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). More recent data support the continued high cost of transitional education at both two-year and four-year colleges.

For taxpayers, there is the concern that they are paying a second time for basic education skills in higher education that should have been taught in secondary schools. The debate continues about which educational institution, the K-12 school system or the two-year or four-year college, is responsible for providing needed transitional education courses. Yet, it is clear that there are currently many students who enter college unprepared for college-level coursework.

Although the high cost of transitional education to the taxpayers is noteworthy, students also bear the costs. According to Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2010), "the financial, psychological, and opportunity costs borne by the students themselves may be even more significant" (p. 4). Students in the lowest quartile of SES are more likely (63%) to undertake transitional education coursework (USDOE, 2004). Students, especially the ones in the lowest socioeconomic status, often bear the costs for transitional education. As previously noted, the majority of transitional education courses do not result in credits toward a college degree, thereby adding additional time to accumulate the credits needed to attain a college degree. Also, with regard to the transitional education students who receive financial aid, "in some states, they deplete their eligibility for financial aid" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 4). This situation occurs because there are a maximum number of credits that the federal government will fund, and transitional education courses, despite not earning credit toward graduation, do count toward eligibility for financial aid. The most economically vulnerable students also bear additional costs beyond the financial costs.

Sequence of Courses

It is a challenge to have several courses in a sequence for students to complete to exit the transitional education program. Nationally, transitional education programs have been criticized for delaying students' progress by requiring multiple courses in a sequence (Bailey et al., 2010). In the fall of 2000, 20% of colleges and universities that offered transitional education courses in reading had three or four transitional education course requirements in reading for students to complete in sequence (see Figure 3). This number is comparable to the three or four levels of required transitional education mathematics (32%) and writing (18%) courses (USDOE, 2003c). For students needing to enroll in all subjects for transitional education courses, it may take one or two years before they ever enroll in a college-level course.

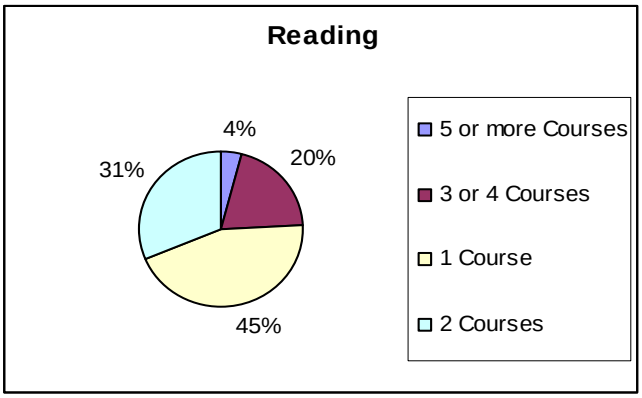

Figure 3. Number of Transitional Education Reading Courses

Number of transitional education reading courses offered in 2000, as indicated by degree-granting institutions, by subject area.

Note: Data are based on Title IV degree-granting institutions that enrolled freshmen in Fall 2000 and offered at least one remedial course in reading. Details may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: Reprinted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, *Survey on Remedial Education in Higher Education Institutions: Fall 2000*.

Students are not moving successfully through the sequence of transitional education courses to advance to college-level coursework. In a longitudinal study based on an analysis of data from more than 250,000 students, from 57 colleges in seven states, who began their enrollment in Fall 2003 or Fall 2004 and continued through Summer of 2006 or Summer 2007, the researchers found that only 3 to 4 of every 10 students completed the sequence of transitional education courses (Bailey et al., 2008). The study also found that the primary reason students did not complete the sequence was not because they failed the course but because they did not enroll in the first transitional course in sequence or because they passed the course but failed to enroll in the next subsequent course (Bailey et al., 2008). The study results indicate that an intervention,

such as academic advising or other assistance, is necessary for students to enroll in transitional education courses in the proper sequence.

Providing sequential courses for a transitional education subject is a challenge because of the low number of students who successfully exit the sequence. Therefore, many institutions are exploring possible strategies to shorten the sequence of the transitional education courses. Nevertheless, according to a recent study conducted by the Community College Research Center, "available evidence on the effectiveness of accelerating developmental education is promising, though not plentiful" (Edgecombe, 2011, p. 35); thus, more evidence-based research is needed to cement the merits of acceleration.

In summary, there are several challenges in transitional education, such as some states' limiting funding for the programs, low college completion rates, the debate about the cost for taxpayers and students to pay for basic skills in college, and the low number of students who are successfully completing the sequence of courses. But, these challenges also can be viewed as opportunities for improvement. For example, although some states who do not perceive transitional education as effective and limit its funding. However, other states as well as philanthropic organizations are funding efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of the programs. It is imperative that there be a concerted effort to address the challenges because of the profound impact on the experiences of students who are enrolled in the transitional education courses.

Influence of Transitional Education Reading Courses

The number of students who test into transitional education reading courses is lower than the number testing into other subjects such as math and writing. According to

NCES statistics, the highest proportion of transitional education courses provided was in mathematics (71%) (USDOE, 2003c). The second highest proportion of transitional education courses provided was in writing (68%), and the third highest proportion of transitional education courses offered was in reading (56%) (NCES, 2003c). Indeed, reading courses represent the lowest proportion of transitional education courses; yet, nearly all college-level courses require reading textbooks, articles, or other materials that necessitate strong reading comprehension skills.

The reading comprehension skills that are taught in transitional education reading courses, such as critical thinking, inferences, author's tone, purpose, fact and opinion, can assist in preparation for college-level courses. Byron McClenney, project director of Achieving the Dream at University of Texas, recommended that transitional courses focus first on reading: "Reading should be the first requirement for students who test into developmental reading, writing, and mathematics" (Boylan, 2008, p. 17). The Condition of Education postulated that the need for transitional education reading is the "most serious barrier to degree completion" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 63). Similarly, the Strong American Schools (2008) report indicated that a deficiency in reading comprehension skills can have a substantial negative impact on students' college completion goals. According to the Strong American Schools report, one study found that of students in transitional education reading courses, more than two thirds were enrolled in three or more additional transitional education courses and only 12% earned a bachelor's degree. Therefore, the potential influence on students' experiences and the number of students affected underlies the selection and importance of transitional educational reading courses as the focus of this study.

In summary, of the three types of transitional education courses, reading is more applicable in preparing students for college-level courses. Although math and writing skills are needed in some college-level courses, almost all college-level courses require reading comprehension skills. A deficiency in reading comprehension skills can decrease the probability of college completion.

Empirical Studies Related to Transitional Education

Empirical studies on transitional education are sparse. States, schools, and colleges need to gather more data on transitional education to learn the extent of the problem, to better understand the needs of the students, and to produce better outcomes (Strong American Schools, 2008). Nevertheless, in an effort to eradicate the lack of empirical evidence in transitional education, a few recent empirical studies have emerged; these studies are discussed in this section.

In 2011, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) gathered information about student access, institutional accountability, and budget constraints from 1,300 stakeholders (ranging from students to college presidents and chancellors) in 10 regions of the country (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). The result of this data collection and analysis was a report, *Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future*, which was completed in early 2012. The report included significant findings relevant to this exploratory study on transitional education.

The AACC (2012) report concluded that community colleges needed a new vision with recommendations for improvement in the "Three Rs": Redesign students' educational experiences, Reinvent institutional roles, and Reset the system (p. x). Of the

three Rs, the notion of redesigning students' educational experiences is most pertinent to this exploratory study because it addresses the need to improve college completion rates by 50% by 2020, decrease the number of students who enter college underprepared for college-level coursework and at the same time double the number of students who complete transitional education courses, and close the American skills gaps by focusing on career and technical education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012).

Although the AACC (2012) report stated that "developmental education as traditionally practiced is dysfunctional" (p. ix), its implementation strategies to address this problem, which include exploring evidence-based avenues to accelerate students' progress through the courses and incorporating course design principles, are lacking some key components. Although the implementation strategies are worthy of exploring with regard to improvements, the area of focus is redesigning students' educational experiences. As previously noted, the report included no mention of exploring the students' voices or their educational experiences. As a result, the primary focus was on course design and delivery improvement; this singular focus is one of the problems in transitional education because it does not account for students' voices.

Another study, conducted by the Community College Research Center at two community colleges over one semester, investigated the relationship between summarization skills (brief presentation of text and identification of key ideas) and participation in a contextualized literacy intervention in a sample of community college transitional education reading and writing students (Perin, Peverly, Mason, & Vaselewski, 2011). The study involved a purposive sample of 16 transitional education classrooms that were recruited for each experiment; in both experiments, 12 of the

classrooms received the intervention and 4 classrooms served as a comparison group. In Experiment 1 (n = 322 students), the intervention was a contextualization of a science text, and all the reading passages and practices were related to science topics. In Experiment 2 (n = 365 students), a second condition added the use of a generic text, and participants were randomized to science or generic.

The intervention remained the same, except the vocabulary items and persuasive writing prompts were tied to the topics. All the participants followed nearly the same transitional education course curriculum, with the exception of the experiment group's requirement to complete 10 additional intervention units as homework during the semester. The results found that both groups of students—Experiment 1 and Experiment 2—who received the intervention, contextualization, had greater gains than the comparison group in identification of main ideas, accuracy of information, and word count (Perin et al., 2011).

A recent study was conducted to determine whether or not college students perceived required transitional education courses as beneficial in their academic performance and persistence in college (Green, 2011). The study was conducted at a higher education institution in the southern region of the United States. The sample consisted of 133 students (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) enrolled during the first semester of summer school.

The students were administered a survey developed by the researcher that gauged their perceptions of the transitional courses and the impact of these courses. The responses were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *no extent* to *a great extent*. Based on the results of the survey, 97.1% of the participants indicated that the transitional

education courses enhanced their academic performance to some extent or greater (Green, 2011). Additionally, 84.3% indicated that the transitional education courses helped them remain in college to some extent or greater (Green, 2011).

In an effort to provide empirical evidence to answer the question of whether or not transitional education works, Bahr (2010) conducted a longitudinal study. The data were collected and analyzed by the Chancellor's Office of California Community Colleges for six years, beginning with the fall 1995 cohort (Bahr, 2010). California had 104 community colleges that were semester based, resulting in an analytical cohort of 68, involving 884 students. The researcher controlled for variables such as sex, age, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, academic goal (as written on college application), grade in first English course, grade in first math course, and four measures of enrollment patterns. The researcher focused on students' ultimate attainment in math and English.

Bahr's (2010) study was conducted to determine the extent to which depth and breadth of underpreparation at college entry moderates the effect of successful remediation on academic attainment. The researcher stated, "Depth of underpreparation refers to the degree of deficiency in a given subject area, while breadth of underpreparation refers to the number of basic skill areas in which a student requires remedial assistance" (Bahr, 2010, p. 179). The researcher concluded that transitional education courses are effective even for students who have "greatest academic deficiencies as well as those who face multiple deficiencies" (Bahr, 2010, p. 201).

Recently, researchers at the National Bureau of Economic Research also conducted a longitudinal study on the effects of transitional education courses (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). Both Bahr's (2010) and Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez's

research involved large datasets and examined the effects of transitional education. Specifically, Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez analyzed the data for 100,000 first-time degree seeking students enrolled in six community colleges in a large, urban community college system between Fall 2001 and Fall 2007. It is interesting to note that 90% of all the students tested into a transitional education course (72% math, 72% writing, and 38% reading). The researchers explored the effects in three models of transitional education: development for future coursework, discouragement from further study, or simply diversion onto a separate track (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012).

The students were followed for three years after they first tested into the transitional education courses and were tracked for their credits, grades, degree outcomes, and transfers to other public two- or four-year institutions within the same urban area (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). Although college completion was not a focus of the research, 85% of the student sample were full-time; after three years of tracking, 64% of the students had dropped out (not enrolled, no degree), 24% were still enrolled, and only 12% had completed a degree or transferred to a local public four-year institution (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). The results of Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez's research failed to indicate that transitional education sufficiently develops students' skills to improve their chances of college-level success; neither did it provide discouragement. Nevertheless, there was favorable evidence for the "diversion" model, in which students enrolled in these transitional education courses instead of taking college-level courses in the relevant subject.

A recent study was conducted at a midsized regional public university in a southeastern U.S. state to investigate the self-efficacy beliefs, sources of self-efficacy,

and influences on level of confidence in reading among first-year college students placed in transitional education reading courses in comparison to students not placed in these courses (Cantrell, Correll, Clouse, Creech, Bridges, & Owens, 2013). The study consisted of 100 participants, 59 students enrolled in transitional education reading courses and 41 students enrolled in English 101 courses. A 42-item survey was used to measure the participants' self-efficacy as well as sources of self-efficacy. The survey included two open-ended items that asked questions about the most positive and negative influence on level of confidence in reading. The results of the study conducted by Cantrell et al. (2013) indicated that students enrolled in transitional education reading courses had significantly lower levels of self-efficacy in academic and personal contexts when compared to students in English 101. However, the results also concluded that both groups of students reported mastery experiences as the most positive influence on reading self-confidence.

The empirical studies assist in filling the void of evidence-based research needed in transitional education. The study by the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) incorporated the feedback from many stakeholders across the country; however, one of its recommendations was to improve the curriculum and delivery of transitional education courses. These findings are supported by the study from the Center of Community College Research that found incorporating contextualization in the transitional education courses can improve students' comprehension skills (Perin et al., 2011). Although it is commendable that students' academic skills improved, the studies did not focus on the students' perceptions and their voices. Whereas the study conducted by Green (2011) did examine students' perceptions in areas of transitional education

courses and their impact on college completion, it did not focus on students' perceptions of intelligence. The longitudinal study conducted by Bahr (2010) contributed to the empirical research for transitional education because it involved studying this population over an extended time and addressed the controversy regarding the effectiveness of transitional education. Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez (2012) contributed to the empirical research because their research consisted of a recent longitudinal study with a large student dataset. Although their study also examined the effectiveness of transitional education, it was expanded to include examination of discouragement and diversion models. Nevertheless, only one, of the empirical research, Cantrell et al., focused specifically on transitional education reading courses and the experiences of students enrolled in these courses (2013). However, it was a quantitative study with a survey as the primary instrument and did not focus on the student voices in the educational journey or perceptions of intelligence.

Theory of Identity

There are several prominent theories of identity, ranging from Erickson's historic conceptions of psychosocial development to Chickering's seven vectors on student development (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Chickering & Reissner, 1993). Chickering described one of the seven vectors, establishing identity, as a sense of self that manifests from historical events, social and cultural conditions, and family and ethnic heritage (Chickering & Reissner, 1993. In the review of the theories of identity, Gee's (2000) theory on identity seemed most aligned to students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Identity by Gee

Gee (2000) defined identity as certain "kinds of person" in a given context with multiple identities connected not to their "internal states" but to their performance in society (p. 99). He discussed four ways to view identity through process, power, and sources of power: (a) nature-identity, (b) institution-identity, (c) discourse-identity, and (d) affinity-identity. First, the nature-identity (process) is a state developed from forces (power) in nature (source of power). This power comes naturally and does not involve a person's doing or accomplishing something. Second, the institution-identity (process) is a position authorized by authorities (power) within institutions (source of power). The institution, by its laws, rules, traditions or principles, can identify a person as a student enrolled in a college or university. Third, discourse-identity (process) is an individual trait recognized in the discourse dialogue (power) of or with "rational" individuals (source of power) (Gee, 2000, p. 103). Last, affinity-identity (process) involves experiences shared in the practice (power) of affinity groups (source of power). In defining an affinity group, Gee stated, "Allegiance is primarily to a set of common endeavors or practices and secondarily to other people in terms of shared culture or traits" (p. 105). Gee also noted that identity needs an interpretive system. The interpretive system can include historical and cultural views with regard to nature, institutions, discourse, and affinity groups (Gee, 2000).

In summary, Gee's (2000) theory of identity was selected because of its important connection to this exploratory study on students' experiences enrolled in transitional education reading courses. Students are assigned to transitional education reading courses by the laws, rules, traditions or principles of an institution. According to Gee's

theory of institutional identity, students are enrolled in transitional education reading courses based on an institution's rules regarding the college placement test results. Students enrolled in these courses interact and communicate with each other, thereby forming the discourse identity. Students enrolled in transitional education reading courses may reexamine their natural abilities in learning, thereby performing an activity that is related to Gee's theory of nature identity. Additionally, students enrolled in these courses may share an allegiance to the other students in the course because of the shared class endeavors and learning, thereby reflecting a tie to Gee's affinity identity.

Analysis of Gee's theory of identity. Gee's (2000) identity theory focuses on the four ways to view identity—through nature, institution, discourse, and affinity—and how these views, including recognition by others, can impact access, networking, experiences, and mobility in the global, contemporary world. While Gee's identity theory has merit, it does not focus on race, gender, class, or ability. These characteristics can shape people's identity and how they interact with each other. If, for instance, there were only students of color enrolled in transitional education courses, this factor could negatively impact the identity of the students who feel that, because of their race, they do not have the ability to function academically at the same level as students of other races who do not need the courses. If the other races also held this view of identity for the students of color, this perception could impact their educational journey.

Gee (2000) did make a valid point that identity is based on an interpretive system. The views on these issues can impact the identity of students enrolled in transitional education courses. For example, if an institution (college or university), through its power, does not grant college credit for courses that may take a student one or two years

to complete, some students may perceive that the courses are insignificant to reaching their college completion goals. The students' identity could indicate that they do not perceive themselves to be intelligent enough to be placed in college-level courses worthy of being granted college credit. The interpretive system can influence a person's identity.

Theories of Self-efficacy and Intelligence

There are several dominant theoretical models or perspectives regarding student development, such as the importance of cognitive structures, exemplified by the work of Perry, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and King and Kitchener and the influence of campus environment and students' characteristics, as explored by Astin (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). There are several theoretical frameworks for intelligence, ranging from William Perry's model or scheme that resulted from interviews with Harvard students to Marcia Baxter Magolda's model of epistemological reflection, which explored ways that students develop knowledge (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). All the theoretical frameworks provide insight into student development and intelligence. Along with Gee's (2000) theory of identity, the two selected for this exploratory study are Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy and Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence because they are the most appropriate to this exploratory study based on the research questions and analysis of the data.

Self-efficacy by Bandura

Bandura (1982) stated that efficacy "involves a generative capability in which component cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes" (p. 122). Self-perceptions of efficacy have a strong influence on self-regulatory strategies, motivation, student achievement,

and persistence. Conversely, perceived self-inefficacy can elicit futility and despondency.

Bandura (1982) posited that there is a strong connection between self-efficacy and effort. In the face of difficulties or challenges, people who have a low sense of self-efficacy decrease their efforts or quit; however, people with a strong sense of self-efficacy increase their efforts to overcome the difficulties or challenges. This assertion does not mean that people with a high sense of self-efficacy lack uncertainty about the task at hand, but the sense of uncertainty (in terms of the challenges of the task and not one's capabilities) ignites the preparation needed to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to master the challenge (Bandura, 1982).

Determination of whether a low sense of self-efficacy or a strong sense of self-efficacy is accurate or faulty is, according to Bandura (1982), based on four principal sources of information: performance attainment, vicarious experience of observing the performances of others, verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences, and physiological states. First, performance attainment "… provides the most influential source of efficacy information because it can be based on authentic mastery experiences" (Bandura, 1982, p. 126). Second, vicarious experiences refer to a person seeing others perform successfully and thinking that he or she also has the capability to master similar tasks (Bandura, 1982). Third, Bandura explained that verbal persuasion results from people galvanizing others to believe they have the capabilities to achieve their goals. Finally, physiological states occur when people judge their own capability, strength, and vulnerability (Bandura, 1982). The evidence for the four types of information is based on a microanalytic methodology employed by Bandura through which individuals were

"presented with graduated self-efficacy scales representing tasks varying in difficulty, complexity, stressfulness, or some other dimension, depending on the particular domain of functioning being explored" (Bandura, 1982, p. 124). Utilizing the four principal sources of information to make judgment about a person sense of self-efficacy can determine the effort exerted and the persistence.

Perceived self-inefficacy stands in contrast to perceived self-efficacy. Bandura (1982) reported that people having perceptions of self-inefficacy can lead to feelings of futility and despondency. He stated further that the feelings of futility and despondency result from the inability to influence events and social conditions and create anxiety (1982).

In summary, Bandura (1982) purported that perceptions of self-efficacy are based on the integration of cognitive, social, and behavioral skills in human agency. Self-efficacy can have a strong influence on a person thoughts, actions, and emotions. In contrast to self-efficacy, perceptions of self-inefficacy are developed when people perceive that they have no control over events and social conditions and experience feelings of futility and despondency.

Analysis of Bandura's Self-efficacy by Zimmerman and Pajares. Zimmerman (2000) and Pajares (1996) analyzed Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy from various perspectives and focuses. Zimmerman provided a general overview of self-efficacy as a social cognitive theory defined by Bandura. On the other hand, Pajares focused on Bandura's self-efficacy beliefs in an academic setting. Both Zimmerman and Pajares examined the effect of self-efficacy on performance through effort, persistence,

and perseverance, distinguishing between self-efficacy and self-concept as described by Bandura.

Zimmerman (2000) validated Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy beliefs as a vital social cognitive theory. Zimmerman clarified Bandura's definition of self-efficacy and distinguished it from other related conceptions such as self-conceptions and locus of control. He also clarified the role of self-efficacy with regard to academic motivation.

First, Zimmerman (2000) described Bandura's definition of perceived self-efficacy as "personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals" (p. 83). To clarify the components of the definition, Zimmerman explained that level of self-efficacy is the dependence on the difficulty of the particular task, generality is the transferability of self-efficacy beliefs across activities, and strength is perceived efficacy as measured by the degree of one's certainty about performing a particular task. Also, self-efficacy measures are multidimensional and focus on performance capabilities rather than personal qualities.

Second, Zimmerman (2000) distinguished self-efficacy from other related conceptions such as self-conceptions and locus of control. Zimmerman asserted that self-concept measures self-esteem reactions, whereas self-efficacy focuses exclusively on task-specific performance expectations. Next, Zimmerman made a distinction between locus of control and self-efficacy. In comparison to self-efficacy, locus of control is neither task nor domain specific but rather it refers to general beliefs about the internality or externality of causality (Zimmerman, 2000).

Third, Zimmerman (2000) supported the role of self-efficacy in academic motivation, positing that self-efficacious students undertake difficult and challenging

tasks. His research also found that self-efficacy beliefs are predictive of student effort, rate of performance, and expenditure of energy. Additionally, Zimmerman noted Bandura's finding that students' self-efficacy regarding management of academic tasks influences them emotionally by decreasing their stress, anxiety, and depression. To further validate his support of Bandura's self-efficacy in academic motivation, Zimmerman pointed to the meta-analytic review of nearly 70 studies of persistence and measures of motivation that found a significant positive effect size for students' self-efficacy beliefs.

Pajares (1996) focused on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy in the academic setting: Bandura theorized that judgments of capability are better predictors of related outcomes than are more generalized self-beliefs and that possession of self-regulatory skills can permit students to improve their performances across varied academic activities when the commonalities are cognitively structured. As did Zimmerman (2000), Pajares discussed Bandura's notion that generalizable coping skills work in similar fashion by reducing stress and promoting effective functioning.

Pajares (1996), however, discussed in detail Bandura's (1982) belief about self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Bandura observed that confidence is both a personal and a social construct through which collective systems such as classrooms, teams of teachers, schools, and even school districts develop a sense of collective efficacy, that is, "a group's shared belief in their capabilities to realize given levels of attainment" (as cited in Pajares, 1996, p. 569). According to Bandura, in prejudicially structured systems and social contexts, self-efficacy may not be able to play its role: Although students may possess the necessary skill and high self-efficacy required to achieve, they may choose

not to undertake a task because they lack the necessary incentives (as cited in Pajares, 1996). Therefore, self-efficacy relies upon effective teachers, necessary equipment, or resources to aid students in the adequate performance of academic tasks. Bandura suggested that it is not so much a matter that students do not know what to do, but that they are unable to do what they know (as cited in Pajares, 1996).

In summary, the theory of self-efficacy applies to the topic of this study because students' beliefs about their capabilities in learning are highlighted when they are required to enroll in transitional education courses. In particular, some students may not understand the need to take a transitional education course in reading when they already know how to read. Enrollment in a transitional education reading course elicits their perceptions about learning and reading comprehension skills. Their perceptions of self-efficacy can play a vital role in their educational journey by impacting key areas such as effort, goals, academic motivation, academic persistence, and academic achievement.

Dweck's Self-theories of Intelligence

Dweck (2000) explored a framework for understanding intelligence and achievement that she called self-theories. The beliefs of some students enrolled in transitional education reading courses about their own intelligence are magnified very early in the process of attaining a college degree. Dweck's (2000) self-theories also examined the connection between students' motivation and goals.

The first self-theory described by Dweck was the theory of fixed intelligence; she defined this as the "entity-theory" because some people believe that intelligence is an entity that lies within one and for which there is no change (Dweck, 2000, p. 2). In other words, intelligence is fixed. According to Dweck, students with an entity-theory

framework focus on looking smart by doing easy, low-effort challenges, thereby outperforming other students. They may avoid learning opportunities that are challenging or that may expose their deficiencies. As the researcher noted, such individuals favor a "diet of easy successes" (Dweck, 2000, p. 3). Students who hold to the entity-theory or fixed intelligence are focused more on performance goals; they want to appear smart to the teacher and their peers; these students are more focused on attaining validation.

The researcher described the other self-theory as the "incremental theory," in which intelligence is portrayed as something that can be increased though one's efforts (Dweck, 2000, p. 3). Her research found that students with a growth mindset are "energized by the idea that they [can] have an impact on their mind" (Dweck, 2000, p. 10). Students who hold to the incremental theory focus on learning goals rather than performance goals.

In a study conducted by Hong, Chiu, Lin, and Dweck, the self-theories of intelligence were tested to determine if students who were exposed to an entity theory of intelligence would decline an opportunity to improve their deficient skills (as cited in Dweck, 2000). In the study, students were given articles as part of a reading comprehension test; half of the articles the students read projected the entity theory and the other half projected the incremental theory. Afterwards, students answered some questions about the passage they had read; then they were given a nonverbal ability test. One of the significant results of the study was about those students who received the articles projecting the entity theory; the students had done poorly on the first part of the test and were offered a tutorial: "That was found to be effective in improving

performance on the test for most people" (Dweck, 2000, p. 25). Only 13.3% of the students who had been exposed to the entity theory elected to take the tutorial. On the other hand, when students who had been given articles projecting the incremental theory were offered the same tutorial, 73.3% elected to take the tutorial. This finding supports Dweck's notion that an entity theorist would consider the tutorial to be fruitless because of his or her belief that intelligence is fixed and cannot be changed.

Receiving a college placement test score indicating the need to enroll in a transitional education reading course could be considered a failure by some students. According to Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence, students in the same transitional education reading courses can have very different beliefs about their own intelligence. A student with the entity-theory mindset holds that failure on a college placement test questions their permanent intelligence and, if possible, avoids taking the course at all costs. The researcher stated that students with a belief in fixed intelligence or entity-theory mindset, when faced with failure, can be defensive and view effort as "a sign of low ability, it is aversive and is believed to be ineffective" (Dweck, 2000, p. 41). Consequently, the low score on the college placement test represents a failure to a student with the entity-theory mindset; feeling defensive, the student may not put forth the effort needed to pass the test on a retest if offered by the institution.

Failure can make entity-theory students feel vulnerable and cause them to exhibit symptoms of depression (Dweck, 2000). Dweck and her colleagues conducted a study with college students to compare the failure responses of entity theorists to those of students who were in a period of depression (Dweck, 2000). The students were given the Beck Depression Inventory, a questionnaire that asks 21 questions about symptoms of

depression. The researchers found that "for almost all of the measures, entity theorists looked just like the depressed students, and both were significantly different from incremental theorists" (Dweck, 2000, p. 45).

On the other hand, a student with the incremental-theory mindset believes that his or her present strategy or skills are not adequate and that the transitional education reading course is needed to reach learning goals. In other words, the transitional education reading course can assist the student in learning strategies and skills that will prepare him or her to master the college-level coursework needed to reach the learning goal of attaining a college degree. Students with the incremental-theory belief view the exertion of effort as necessary for a challenging task in "harmony with the short-term and long-term goal of these students—learning" (Dweck, 2000, p. 41).

Aside from the views they have about their own intelligence, entity and incremental theorists have different views on others' intelligence. The different theories of intelligence affect the way people see and react to others' successes and failures (Dweck, 2000). For the entity theorists, others' failure is a reflection of intelligence. For incremental theorists, others' failure elicits thoughts about effort or strategy and the kinds of instruction or transitional education action that would help the students overcome their difficulty (Dweck, 2000). In other words, the beliefs about their intelligence mirror the beliefs they hold about others' intelligence.

Beyond discussion of the fact that some students are underprepared for college-level coursework, examination of the self-theories of intelligence for students enrolled in transitional education courses is important with regard to their impact on students' experiences, identity, goal development, and perceptions of their peers. Entity and

incremental theorists have different attitudes toward their peers. The entity theorists view their peers as rivals; therefore, others' misfortunes bolster their self-esteem (Dweck, 2000). For example, if an entity-theory student performs successfully in a transitional education reading class, his or her self-esteem will be heightened, despite the fact that all of the students are taking the class together because of shared low scores on a college placement assessment. On the other hand, incremental theorists derive self-esteem from their own efforts in striving to succeed; therefore, there is no rivalry with others (Dweck, 2000). In the same transitional education reading class, incremental theorists will seek to master the new skills in class and help others who are struggling.

According to Dweck and a colleague, achievement motivation is "powered by a valuing of both competence acquisition (learning goals) and competence validation (performance goals)" (Dweck & Elliot, 2005, p. 122). The meaning of competence differs between the self-theories. For the entity theorist, competence is something people have and display right away; for the incremental theorist, however, competence is something that grows over time (Elliott & Dweck, 2005).

Dweck's self-theories were tested with college students in a large-scale study conducted by Robins and Pals at the University of California at Berkeley (as cited in Dweck, 2000). The purpose of the research was to determine whether students' theories of intelligence predict their achievement goals, helpless versus master-oriented responses, college grades, and changes in their self-esteem as they progress through college. The results of the study indicated that theories of intelligence do indeed predict the goals that students value in college. Also, the study found that "entity theorists were more likely than incremental theorists to blame their failures on low ability, feel distressed and

ashamed about their academic performance (their college GPAs), and report that they tend[ed] to give up in challenging situations" (Dweck, 2000, p. 35). Additionally, the findings indicated that without manipulation and influence, the students' theories of intelligence were stable over three years (Dweck, 2000).

With regard to the self-theories, there are differences in the values of competence motivation and acquisition. Entity theorists focus on the goal of competence validation (performance goals). On the other hand, incremental theorists focus on the goal of competence acquisition (learning goals). Competence acquisition is linked to learning goals, effort and strategy attributions for setbacks, and the belief that effort increases ability (Dweck & Elliott, 2005).

In summary, Dweck (2000) posited two self-theories regarding how people view intelligence. Some people view their intelligence as a fixed trait. In contrast, some people view their intelligence as a malleable quality that is incremental and that can be enhanced through learning and effort. These two very different views of intelligence can have an impact on effort, persistence, and goal development and can play an instrumental role in students' experience.

Analysis of Dweck's Self-theories of Intelligence. Dweck's (2000) self-theories have contributed greatly to the field of student retention and achievement. Whereas most research examines external factors, such as social integration, student engagement, faculty interaction, and support networks, Dweck's self-theories focus on internal factors such as how students view their intelligence and the intelligence of others. Dweck thoroughly explained her self-theories, fixed entity and incremental entity. Her theory

has been supported through her own research as well as empirical studies completed by other researchers.

There are, however, some issues with the self-theories. One issue involves the concept that effort is key for incremental theorists. During the earlier stages of learning, in the secondary school years, parents and teachers exert most of the pressure regarding students' efforts. During college, however, there is less parental guidance or professor intervention with regard to homework and studies; the student is more responsible for self-regulating and putting forth the needed effort to achieve.

Second, although learning goals are worthwhile for an incremental theorist, an individual can have both learning and performance goals in life. Another issue involves the question of whether having performance goals as the priority (entity theorists) for adult students is positive or negative. Nevertheless, especially in the college setting, having performance goals, such as attaining a college degree, allows more opportunities to improve one's quality of life than does excelling at several college courses without attaining a college degree. Also, it is unclear which one comes first, students' views about their intelligence or their performance in school, which then shapes their views about their intelligence. In other words, not passing a college placement test several times and having to enroll in transitional education courses could change a student's mindset about his or her intelligence. These issues indicate the need for further clarification of Dweck's self-theories model.

Relationship between the Theoretical Models Reviewed

Several empirical studies have been reviewed in this section, including empirical studies with recommendations for improvement in the community college level,

incorporating contextualization in the curriculum, sequence of transitional education courses, and the perceptions of academic performance and persistence held by students enrolled in transitional education courses. Most importantly, this section has presented review and analysis of the three theories that form the theoretical framework for this study: identity, self-theories of intelligence, and academic self-efficacy. There is a strong, integrated relationship between the three theoretical frameworks.

Dweck's (2000) two competing mindsets, the fixed mindset, in which ability is fixed and unchangeable, and the incremental mindset, in which ability is not limited, but improvable, can be related to Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy and self-inefficacy with regard to effort. Dweck noted that when individuals with the incremental mindset are faced with challenges or difficulties, they exert the effort to overcome challenges or difficulties; individuals with the fixed mindset view effort as a sign of low ability and ineffectiveness (Dweck, 2000). This notion is similar to Bandura's view that people with a strong sense of self-efficacy will increase their efforts to overcome the difficulties or challenges whereas people with a low sense of self-efficacy will decrease their efforts or quit.

Both Dweck and Bandura's theories of intelligence and self-efficacy are related to Gee's theory of nature identity. According to Gee (2000), the natural abilities of a person do not involve a person doing or accomplishing something. Gee's nature identity is connected Dweck's self-theory of intelligence for which intelligence is a fixed entity intelligence that lies within one and there is no change. Persons with this nature identity towards intelligence may not put forth the efforts to overcome the difficulties or challenges faced with improving their intelligence as a result of self-inefficacy.

Dweck (2000) and Bandura (1982) also are connected through their theories regarding goals. Bandura posited that people with a perceived self-inefficacy or low sense of self-efficacy have doubts about the likelihood of completing their goals and subgoals. He further explained that people can give up trying to reach their goals for one of two reasons: "Either they doubt their capabilities or they expect their efforts to produce no results due to the unresponsiveness, negative bias, or punitiveness of the environment" (Bandura, 1982, p. 140). Dweck distinguished the goals for the two mindsets as performance and learning. The fixed entity-mindset theorists focus on the goal of performance and validation of their competence. Competence validation is linked to "ability-oriented performance goals, ability attributions for setbacks, and the belief that effort indicates low ability" (Dweck, 2005, p. 137). The incremental-mindset theorists focus on the goal of learning; competence acquisition comprises efforts and strategies toward learning (Dweck, 2000).

The students enrolled in the same transitional education reading course share an affinity identity as described by Gee because "allegiance is primarily to a set of common endeavors or practices" (2000, p. 105). The students' common endeavor is enrollment in the same transitional education reading course and the need to successfully complete the course. Although enrolled in the same course as a result of failure on a college placement test, as noted by Dweck, entity and incremental theorists have different attitudes toward their peers and others' intelligence (2000). These difference perceptions of intelligence are connected to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy through the efforts of the students enrolled in the course. Additionally, these different perceptions of intelligence and effort

are processed in the discourse-identity described by Gee because it is an individual trait recognized in the dialogue with the students in the course (2000).

Dweck's and Bandura's theories are also connected on the psychological level. People with the fixed mindset exhibit symptoms of depression (Dweck, 2000). Similarly, according to Bandura's (1982) theory, people with a perceived self-inefficacy have feelings of futility and despondency. The feelings of futility and despondency can result from the identity described by Gee as the institution identity (2000). Institutions, by its laws and rules has the power to mandate that all incoming students, with a few exceptions, must take a college placement test and this power is authorized by authorities. Thus, students can feel powerless about their need to take the college placement test, their anxiety about passing the test, and the social conditions that can manifest if they do not pass the test and need to enroll in transitional education courses.

The theoretical theories reviewed and analyzed in this section support the influence of transitional education courses on students' educational experiences. The transitional education courses have an impact on students' identity, views on intelligence as well as academic self-efficacy. Therefore, the theoretical frameworks by Gee, Dweck, and Bandura lay the foundation for this exploratory study

Relevance to the Current Study

Gee's (2000) theory on identity, Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence, and Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy have significant relevance for this exploratory study.

Gee's four identities: nature, institution, discourse, affinity have relevance for students enrolled in transitional education reading courses (2000). Early in their educational

journey, the students that are enrolled in courses because of not meeting the cutoff score on college placement tests are confronted with the revelation of their deficiencies of skills in reading, writing, or math. Thus, they are faced with examining their nature identity when they enroll in college. Then, they are administered the college placement test by the institution identity through its laws and rules. Next, they share an affinity identity because they are placed in the same class with other students with the same endeavors, and they have a discourse identity through the dialogue with other students in the class.

Dweck's self-theories focus on different mindsets of intelligence that have relevance for students enrolled in transitional education reading courses because the enrollment is based on their college placement test scores. Students generally will fall into one of the mindsets described in Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence, fixed or incremental. Additionally, their respective mindsets impact their views toward other people's intelligence.

Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy relates to views of capability in areas of cognitive, social, and behavioral skills. The three theories are applicable to traditional and nontraditional students of different racial groups and SES. The demographics revealed in the literature review indicated that the majority of students enrolled in transitional education courses are students of color and of lower SES; however, many of the enrolled students represent diversity in race and SES.

The connections of Gee's (2000) theory of identity, Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy, and Dweck's (2000) theory of intelligence are noted in the questions in the interview guide, which is detailed in Chapter III. The literature review lays the foundation for this exploratory study of students enrolled in transitional education

reading courses with regard to their views of intelligence, the intelligence of others, perceptions of others view of their own intelligence, and academic self-efficacy.

Research Gap

The review of literature revealed a gap in the research related to the educational experiences for students enrolled in transitional education reading courses. The majority of studies and literature identifying factors associated with persistence (or factors associated with retention) were based on the educational journey and social integration of students enrolled in four-year colleges; the research did not focus on students enrolled in transitional education courses. An example of this prominent research was Tinto's (1975) model of departure that focused mainly on traditional, younger students who lived at residential four-year institutions. Tinto's model did not address the issue of students' underpreparedness for college. Also, for the students in Tinto's study, social integration was a key factor in their student development and whether or not they completed college. Nevertheless, the needs of traditional, residential students at four-year colleges are not the same as the needs of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses at a community college.

Most of the students enrolled in transitional education courses are nontraditional, community college students who do not live in residential facilities. The nontraditional students usually have been out of school longer and have more responsibilities outside college. Bean and Metzner (1985) pointed out that social integration is not as important as the institution's academic offerings for the nontraditional college student. Although their focus is on the academic offerings, a significant number of nontraditional students

are enrolled in community colleges and are not prepared for college-level coursework (Attewell et al., 2006; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

In summary, although a significant number of students test into transitional education courses, there has been no substantive study focusing on these underprepared students enrolled in transitional education reading courses and identity, perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy at community colleges. Considering the number of underprepared students who enter the community college, test into transitional education courses, and do not attain a college degree, there is a need for an exploratory qualitative study of the lived experiences of this population. There is also a need to study their perceptions of intelligence and self-efficacy.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a review of the literature in the key areas of transitional education such as its history, the fundamental structure, demographics, enrollment, transitional reading courses, and some of the challenges. The review also included discussion of some empirical studies relevant to transitional education such as perspectives of identity, theories of self-efficacy, and self-theories of intelligence. Included also was an overview of empirical evidence related to transitional education. The empirical evidence provides the framework for the analysis of the data; it supports the purpose of this exploratory study, exposing the research gap and the need for the study.

Chapter III presents the methods to be used in answering the research questions. The chapter includes information about the research design, data collection, data analysis,

and data presentation. It also includes discussion of the trustworthiness and validity of the study and information about human participants and ethics precautions.

Chapter III

Methodology

This exploratory study examined the experiences in the educational journey of students who were enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college in a greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States. Specifically, through this study the researcher explored how the students perceived their intelligence, the intelligence of other students, how they perceived other's perceptions of their intelligence, and how they perceived their academic self-efficacy. The researcher sought an understanding of the students' experiences through their voices. This chapter presents a description and justification for the use of qualitative research methodology and an overview of constructivism as the paradigm of inquiry. The research questions, based on the review of the literature, for the study are identified. Information about the qualitative research includes a description of the theoretical perspectives, the site selection process, and the study participants. In this chapter the processes of data collection, analysis, and presentation are discussed, as well as the trustworthiness and validity of the study, considerations regarding human participants, and ethical precautions.

Paradigm of Inquiry

The paradigm of inquiry for the study is constructivism. A paradigm is a philosophical worldview, which Creswell (2009) defined as "a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds" (p. 6). The purpose of the

constructivism approach, as noted by Merriam (2009), is to describe, understand, and interpret a single event that is socially constructed with multiple realities. In this research, students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college located in a greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States described multiple realities in their narratives and his or her way of making meaning of the world. Collected data were used to construct the knowledge for this research.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to using the constructivism approach as the paradigm of inquiry. An advantage of the constructivism approach is its helpfulness to researchers in examining the unique experiences of individuals; "each one's way of making sense of the world is valid and worthy of respect" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). The constructivism approach also has a potential disadvantage for the researcher. As Crotty (1998) noted, the constructivism approach tends to be harmful because some researchers resist the "critical spirit" in interpreting how individuals make sense of their world (p. 58).

The assumptions that Crotty (1998) associated with constructivism are aligned with qualitative research. One assumption of constructivism is that human beings construct meaning as they engage with the world (Crotty, 1998). The semi-structured interview questions allowed the study participants to share their perceptions and interpretations on how they make meaning of their world. The researcher utilized semi-structured interview questions based upon issues generated through the review of the literature. The students enrolled in the transitional education reading courses responded to semi-structured interview questions regarding issues such as intelligence and academic

self-efficacy. The semi-structured interview questions allowed the researcher to probe further if the responses needed to be clarified or if the responses were unique.

Another assumption of constructivism is that humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives (Crotty, 1998). Through the responses to the research questions, students enrolled in transitional education reading classes made sense of the historical and their social perspectives of the class in their educational journey. This research was inductive in that the researcher generated meaning through data collection from interviews and review of existing data. Thus, based on the philosophical worldview, assumptions, and review of the literature, constructivism was selected as the appropriate vehicle to guide the research and design for this study.

Rationale for Employing Qualitative Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative methodology to conduct research on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college in a greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States. Based on the gap that was discovered through review of the literature, the problem statement mandated a qualitative, exploratory study as the best approach for the research. Merriam (2009) listed the following characteristics for qualitative research: a focus on quality (nature); constructivism as one of its philosophical roots; discovery and meaning as investigation goals; a design that is flexible, evolving, and emergent; the researcher as the primary instrument; an inductive primary mode of analysis; and use of rich description in the findings.

Use of a qualitative research design addressed the gap in the literature and the problem statement in several ways. First, the research design focused on the quality of

students' voices and perceptions rather than quantitative data such as enrollment figures, completion rates, or GPAs. Second, the goal of the researcher was to investigate how students enrolled in transitional education reading courses make meaning of their educational journey. Third, the research design allowed flexibility through the use of the semi-structured interview questions that permitted follow-up questions if study participants made comments that needed further probing to gain insight into their realities and meanings. Further, the researcher was the primary instrument for the interviews and data gathering. The primary mode of analysis was inductive, and there were multiple theories to frame the study. Lastly, the findings included a rich description to assist in understanding the students' educational journeys, their perceptions of intelligence, and their perceptions of their self-efficacy. By employing a qualitative research design as the methodology, the researcher was able to address the problem statement created from the review of the literature.

Design of the Semistructured Procedure

For this study of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses, the best approach was the semistructured procedure that employed an interview guide. This section presents discussion of the key components of the interview guide. The section also presents a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of the interview guide. Additionally, the parts of the interview protocol are outlined.

There are several components of the semistructured procedure. One key component of the semistructured procedure is the interview guide. The purposes of the interview guide are to facilitate the interviews, keep the research on track, and gather the data needed to answer research questions.

Another key component of the interview is the actual interview questions. As Merriam (2009) noted, "the key to getting good data from interviewing is to ask good questions; asking good questions takes practice" (p. 95). The interview questions were exploratory and inductive in nature. The types of questions avoided in the interview protocol were multiple questions in one question, leading questions, and yes-or-no questions (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions were linked to specific research questions to develop a crosswalk between interview and research questions (see Table 1). A detailed list of the crosswalk between interview and research questions is found in Appendix A.

Table 1. Summary of Crosswalk of Interview Questions and Research Questions

Research question (RQ1) and Subsets of Research Questions (SRQs)	Interview Questions
RQ1: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey?	3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
SRQa: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their intelligence?	5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, and 21
SRQb: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive the intelligence of other students?	8, 9, 10, and 11
SRQc: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive other's perceptions of their own intelligence (the college, faculty, peers, family, society)?	14, 15, 16, 17, and 18
SRQd: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their academic self-efficacy?	19, 20, and 21

There are advantages to using emergent interview techniques or a semi-structured interview. One advantage of using emergent interview techniques or a semi-structured interview was the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to collect additional data on the emerging topic. The researcher handled probes or subquestions as a follow up to the main exploratory research questions by linking the two sets of questions during the interview. Another advantage was that probing assisted in asking the study participants to provide more details, clarification, or examples with regard to their answers (Merriam, 2009).

A disadvantage of using an interview guide to facilitate interviews is that the researcher may become fixated on following the guide and may overlook potentially important information that might be discovered through the interview. Consequently, the researcher might not listen to key points shared by an interviewee during the interview. These key points or observations could be vital in understanding the students' experiences explored through the study or in answering the research questions.

Part A – Interview protocol

The motives and intentions underlying the study were to learn about the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. The purpose of the inquiry was to gather meaningful data and information from the study participants to answer the research questions. The methods of collecting and storing information during the interview included note taking and the use of audio equipment. The interview materials and content collected through audio tapes and notes was kept in a secure location. The respondents' information was protected through the use of pseudonyms, thereby meeting the requirement for research involving

human subjects. Each participant was offered a small payment of $10 for participation in the study interview. The interviews were conducted during the semester; each interview was scheduled for approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

Part B – Participant information

There were 20 study participants interviewed, 12 males and 8 females. All the participants were over the age of 18 years old.

Part C – Semi-structured interview questions

The use of a semi-structured interview questions allowed the flexibility to conduct follow-up questions (see Appendix B).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe the elements of experiences for students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college in the greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States to gain a better understanding of their educational journey. Specifically, the study explored how the students perceived their intelligence, the intelligence of other students, how they perceived other's perceptions of their intelligence, and how they perceived their academic self-efficacy. The literature suggested that some students may perceive intelligence as something with which one is born, whereas others may perceive intelligence as something that one can increase through effort. In this exploratory study, the researcher investigated students' perceptions of their own intelligence as well as their perceptions of the intelligence of others through the lens of Dweck's (2000) self-theories on intelligence. Also, the study explored the ways in which the students supported their learning through the lens of Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy. Bandura noted that efficacy involves

organizing cognitive, social, and behavioral skills into courses of action for innumerable purposes (1982).

Research Questions

Research questions should "explain specifically what your study will attempt to learn or understand" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 67). The research questions related to the researcher's goals, explored how study participants made meaning of their educational journey, perceived their intelligence and the intelligence of others, how they perceived other's perception of their own intelligence, and perceived their academic self-efficacy.

Exploratory Research Questions

The foundation for the exploratory research questions related to prior research regarding two theories: Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory and Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence. The exploratory research questions form a whole; they were not random questions on the research topic.

1. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey?

The following subset of research questions are important to address in order to understand the main research question as it related to students' educational journey:

   a. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional

      education reading courses perceive their intelligence?

b. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive the intelligence of other students?

c. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive other's perceptions of their own intelligence (the college, faculty, peers, family, society)?

d. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their academic self-efficacy?

Statement of Significance

The study advanced the field of transitional education in several significant ways. First, it explored some of the elements of the educational journey for students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. Students are enrolled in transitional education courses as a result of not meeting the cutoff score on a college placement test that gauges their intelligence based upon their demonstrated reading comprehension skills. Thus, their educational journey takes a different direction than students who do not need to enroll in courses based on the college placement test. Second, the study provided a better understanding of such students' perceptions of their intelligence, the intelligence of others, and their academic self-efficacy. These perceptions can be influential in understanding students' educational journey as they make meaning of their world. Third, the exploratory study adds basic literature to a needed area in the field of transitional education regarding its influence on college

completion. When reading comprehension skills are the core of the problem for learning college-level coursework, the probability of college completion is very low (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). But, there is limited research on the students' educational journey in transitional education reading courses and its influence on college completion. Moreover, the insights gained from empirical analysis of the data collected were significant in understanding the students and informing practitioners who have an interest in transitional education reading courses.

Theoretical Perspectives to Drive Research

To drive the research, three theoretical frameworks were selected: Gee's (2000) theory on identity, Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy, and Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence. All three concepts were important to understanding the experiences shared by students enrolled in transitional education reading courses. Additionally, all three were necessary to formulate the research questions.

First, Gee's (2000) theory of identity shaped this exploratory study because it relates identity to performance in society. Gee defined identity as certain "kinds of person" in a given context with multiple identities connected not to their "internal states" but to their performance in society (Gee, 2000, p. 99). He discussed four ways to view identity: nature-identity, institution-identity, discourse-identity, and affinity-identity.

Second, Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence provided the theoretical framework to shape the study because the research focused on intelligence as reflected by students not meeting the cutoff score on a college reading comprehension assessment. A significant component was the degree to which students believed intelligence played a role in their educational journey while they were enrolled in a transitional education

reading course. Within the self-theories there is the "entity theory" wherein intelligence is portrayed as an entity that lies within one and does not change. The other end of the spectrum encompasses the "incremental theory" wherein intelligence is portrayed as something that can be increased through one's efforts (Dweck, 2000). The theoretical framework related to intelligence helped to formulate the exploratory research questions.

Third, Bandura's (1977, 1982) self-efficacy framework shaped the study because the study explored how students developed goals and subgoals that support their learning. Bandura (1977) believe that, in the social learning theory, processes of goal setting and self-evaluative reactions can cultivate motivation. He argued that setting attainable subgoals can motivate students to achieve larger goals in the future. He named the subgoals "proximal" and the large goals "distal." Bandura (1982) stated, "Whereas proximal subgoals provide immediate incentives and guides for action, distal goals are too far removed in time to effectively mobilize effort or to direct what one does in the here and now" (p. 134).

In contrast, perceived self-inefficacy can prevent the development of self-efficacy. Bandura (1982) reported that people's perceptions of self-inefficacy can lead to feelings of futility and despondency. He asserted that a person's feelings of futility and despondency are caused by his or her inability to influence events and social conditions, as well as the anxiety resulting from that inability. In such situations, people have doubts about the likelihood of completing their goals and subgoals. Bandura explained further that people may give up trying for one of two reasons: "either they doubt their capabilities or they expect their efforts to produce no results due to the unresponsiveness, negative bias, or punitiveness of the environment" (Bandura, 1982, p. 140). Perceptions

of self-efficacy and self-inefficacy can play a significant role in the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses because of the influence on goal development.

The theories of intelligence and self-efficacy were selected because they are relevant to the gap in the research. The self-theories of intelligence were selected because the researcher found little research about students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college, their perceptions of intelligence, or their perceptions of how intelligence might influence effort and academic achievement. Similarly, little research was found regarding the self-efficacy of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses or the students' beliefs about their learning capabilities and efforts. The review of the literature also demonstrated that research was needed to explore how students enrolled in a transitional education reading course view their identity as being part of a class for students who are underprepared for college-level coursework. This identity can play a major role in their educational journey. The interaction between the two theories, intelligence and self-efficacy, and the perspective on identity was required to complete the study.

Sampling Plan

The sampling plan included the components as outlined by Merriam: (a) where to observe, (b) whom to observe, and (c) what to observe (1998). Thus, there is an in-depth discussion on the selection site, which includes the location and background information. With regard to the consideration of whom to observe, the type of sampling technique is discussed as well as the participant criteria and number of participants. The third part of the sampling plan involves the collection of data from several sources of evidence.

Site Selection

A three-campus community college in the greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States was the site for the study. According to the college's Fact Book, there were 72,235 students (33,817 credit and 38,418 noncredit or continuing education) enrolled in the college in 2010. Almost one third, 31%, of the students were first-generation college students (parents never attended college). A substantial majority (78%) of the students received some type of financial aid (Pell grant, loan, scholarship, need-based aid, or some combination thereof). Although most students received financial aid, almost 60% of the credit students were employed more than 20 hours per week. The institution is a commuter college with no residential facilities.

An important component for site selection was the availability of study participants experiencing the issue or problem identified for the research (Creswell, 2007). The site for this study was selected because 81% of the students had transitional education needs in 2010. The students at the selected site also generated a low rate of college completion, which was similar to the national rate of transitional education students completing college. According to the college's Fact Book, only 39% of the 2006 cohort of community college transitional education students were completers after four years.

The community college studied had a diverse student population. There were 400 international students from 73 different countries enrolled at the college. According to the college's Fact Book, in 2010, largest population of students, which comprised 48% of the student body were White. Minority students represented almost 52% of the student population (credit and noncredit). African American students, 35%, were the second

most populous group in the community college. Significantly behind the African American population of minority students was the third most populous group, Hispanic, at 7%. The rest of the student population included Asian American, multiple, and unreported races. In 2010, the gender categories at the college included 58% female and 42% male. Also, most of the students were nontraditional students in terms of age. The highest percentage of students, 52%, were in the 20-39 range, followed by 26% in the 40-59 range, 13% in the 60 and over range, and only 9% younger than 20. Because of this diversity by race and age, the site was feasible for this exploratory study.

The community college provided cultural awareness through its offices, professional development opportunities for faculty, student organizations, and the student newspaper. One office that provided cultural awareness was the office of multicultural affairs, which sponsored programs and activities for students and staff on all three campuses and the extension centers. For example, that office provided an annual field trip to historically Black colleges and universities. Also, the international student services office provided resources through its student information handbook and international advising. Additionally, the community college provided an extensive 2-week workshop for faculty on the relationship between culture and pedagogy. The community college's office of student life was committed to providing educational experiences that foster civic engagement, leadership development, diversity and inclusion, community involvement, and co-curricular activities. It sponsored more than 30 clubs and organizations. Also, the community college had a student newspaper, which included an arts and culture section.

Participant Selection

The researcher gained permission to enter the classes by e-mails to the department chair and reading faculty. There were eight sections of College Reading II classes selected for this exploratory study. There are two levels of transitional education reading courses in the community college: College Reading I (lower level) and College Reading II (upper level). The study participants were enrolled in College Reading II. The upper level reading course, College Reading II, was selected because the study participants enrolled in College Reading II were closer to exiting the transitional education reading sequence to advance to college-level courses. Also, some of the study participants in College Reading II may have passed College Reading I before enrolling in College Reading II and, therefore, may have insights into both classes. Another criterion was that the study participants were not former students of the researcher.

Students enrolled in College Reading II classes were asked to participate, either by the researcher or the instructor of the class. The maximum class size for a transitional education reading class is 18-20 students, depending on the campus. However, the sample number took into account the fact that some registered students did not actually show up for class and some students elected not to participate in the study. Therefore, the participants in the exploratory study consisted of a sample number of 20 students from eight different College Reading II classes.

The study involved a convenience sampling, defined by Merriam (2009) as "a sample based on time, money, location, availability of sites or respondents, and so on" (p. 79). To make the sampling more credible and to generate rich description, the researcher strived to meet the criterion of a diverse group of students enrolled in a transitional

education reading class. The students were at least 18 years old. According to the George Washington University Institutional Review Board (GWU IRB) Committee on Human Research, students over the age of 18 are considered adults and do not need parent permission to be study participants. The students were not ESOL learners.

The sampling plan details the number of study participants, criteria for the study participants, type of sampling, and classes to be sampled. There was also a sample strategy for existing data. The existing data consisted of the college catalog and the student newspaper.

Method of Obtaining Data

There were several data sources of evidence. The sources of evidence consisted of existing data and interviews for this exploratory study on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college in the greater suburban area in a southeastern state in the United States. A source of evidence was the existing data from the selection site, the community college. This existing data consisted of the most recent institutional research statistics. Other existing data included statistics from national reports regarding completion and noncompletion rates as well as other relevant statistics for students enrolled in transitional education courses and students not required to enroll in such courses. Other existing data was found in the college catalog, student newspaper, and college placement test practice booklet.

The other source of evidence was the semistructured interviews which allowed the researcher to gain some flexibility during the interview process, because the interview had some of the features of both the structured interview and the unstructured interview. A relevant feature of the structured interview was that the predetermined interviews were

aligned to the exploratory research questions. A relevant feature of the unstructured interview was that the researcher was able to follow up interview responses that needed further probing. Therefore, if the interviewee gave a response to a question that was unique or unclear, follow-up questions were asked to collect additional data. Also, the interview questions were inductive in nature. As part of the IRB compliance, the researcher developed a semistructured interview protocol and guide, that is detailed this chapter.

Several research products, as described by Hammersley (1995), have been generated by gathering data from sources of evidence such as descriptions, explanations, evaluations, and theories. Each research product must complement the others and each must be equally valuable. The collection of data was guided by exploratory research questions, the researcher's skills and training, and emerging discoveries.

Data Analysis Methods

According to Merriam (2009), "data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data" and involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what study participants have said and what the researcher has seen and read (p. 175). Part of the process is to develop a coding method to move from data collection to data analysis. To aid in the process, a code book, based on research questions and theoretical frameworks, was developed to classify the data.

Coding Method

To transition from data collection to data analysis, the researcher coded the interview transcripts. It is during the coding process when researchers, "organize, manage, and retrieve the most meaningful bits of our data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.

26). During the analysis and interpretation of data, cycle coding, which is endorsed by Patton (2002) and Saldaña (2009), was be employed. Specifically, the cycle coding included first cycle and second cycle coding.

Saldaña (2009) defined data coded in the first cycle: "… range in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence to an entire page of text to a stream of moving images" (p. 3). The researcher assigned a tag or label to the single word, full sentence, or entire page of text that was meaningful data, thus a code is created. Some codes repeated as a result of the "repetitive patterns of actions and consistencies in human affairs" that was revealed in the data (Saldaña, 2009, p. 5).

Second cycle coding included "advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through First Cycle methods" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 149). In addition, the researcher wrote comments, observations, and marginal annotations. During this time, expansive notes were developed; the researcher was receptive to any data related to the research questions. This type of coding process was defined by Merriam (2009) as "open coding" because did not limit the bits of data (p. 178).

Code book

The codes identified represented the researcher's research findings based on the theoretical framework and research questions. The code book was utilized as a means to organize and maintain the classified data. The code book presented is based research findings from the interviews (see Appendix C).

Existing Data

One step in the analysis of data involved the collection of existing data. The researcher conducted an analysis from the community college regarding college

completion rates for students taking transitional education courses and those not taking any transitional education courses. The data was compared for regularities and irregularities. Existing data consisted of various documents, such as the college catalog, student newspaper, and college placement practice booklet were reviewed for pertinent information. Review of existing data allowed insight into the phenomenon of interest from a secondary source. The researcher continued to consistently use techniques for open coding and grouping data into themes and categories.

Interviews

The other step of the data analysis involved data collected through the interviews. The interviews with the study participants were conducted during the semester. The sampling included 20 study participants from eight different College Reading II transitional education reading classes. To ensure opportunities to have access to the study participants, the interviews were not conducted during the class time. The researcher secured a private location on the campus where the study participants were located. The researcher and study participant arranged a day and time that was convenient to conduct the interview. The inclusion criteria for the interviews students who were enrolled in transitional education reading courses, wished to participate in the study, were not ESOL learners, and were at least 18 years old.

In summary, the information collected through interviews and review of existing data were analyzed. The data analysis process moved from expansive open coding to creation of categories or themes that covered all the bits of data. At this level of analysis, inferences were formed and findings were generated based on the connections among the categories or themes.

Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software

As suggested by Merriam (2009), file folders for the categories or themes were created to manage the units of data. Each category included the original source of evidence, such as the study participant's pseudonym, in case it is needed to reference the data. To assist with this process, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was utilized. Some considerations in selecting the appropriate software for the study included the software structure, design, and complexity. For this study, the CAQDAS determined to be appropriate was the ATLAS.ti. It was selected because it met the consideration requirements, was the best fit to facilitate the data analysis process for the study, and is commonly used by social science researchers.

Data Presentation

After the data was analyzed, the findings were presented using thick and rich description. Data presentation techniques included descriptions of the context, the participants involved, and activities of interest (Merriam, 2009). Also, the data was depicted in the form of quotations, transcripts, and other documents to support the findings, which connected with a description of emergent themes or relationships. An interpretative commentary was provided regarding the particulars as well as general findings from the rich description so that others can, as Merriam (2009) noted, "determine the extent to which their situations match the research context and, hence, whether the findings can be transferred" (p. 229).

The presentation included thematic analysis on some of the key themes that emerged in this exploratory study of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses. After the open coding cycle was completed, the researcher interpreted and

reflected on the codes and grouped the codes based on similar meanings. After the grouping, the researcher moved inductively to construct categories or themes. The categories or themes are, "conceptual elements that 'cover' or span many individual examples" or bits of data (Merriam, 2009). Then, the researcher examined the relationship between the themes. The key, emergent themes answered the exploratory research questions and provided an understanding of the complexity of the students, including their educational journey, perspectives on intelligence and academic self-efficacy.

The information presented in the study's findings represented a balance between analysis and interpretation (Patton, 2002). Erickson (1986) suggested maintaining the balance through differentiation in the particular description, general description, and interpretative commentary. The particular description was derived from the raw data, which consisted of quotations and transcripts of interviews with students enrolled in the transitional education reading courses. For the quotations and other particular description, the researcher clarified whether or not the piece of data represented a generalization of the data as a whole. The researcher provided an interpretative commentary regarding the particular description and the general description to build the connection between the two descriptions and to foster a better understanding. Thus, the data presentation included thick and rich description that was built on a balance of the analysis of the themes and an interpretative commentary of the particular and general types of description.

Subjectivity Statement

I am an educator and a student; since 1993, I have worked with adult learners. At various times during my career of almost 20 years, I have taught transitional education reading courses at local community colleges and universities. Therefore, I am very close to my research project. I am currently employed full time as an associate professor of reading in the community college that is the site for the study. I have worked in the community college for almost 8 years.

My closeness to the study topic has the potential of creating research bias that is both positive and negative. The bias can be positive in that my familiarity with the subject provides insight into some issues related to the research project. I taught my first transitional education reading course in 1996 at a local community college. Over the years in my career, I have taught hundreds of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses at several community colleges as well as several universities. In addition to teaching students enrolled in these courses, I have presented on topics related to students enrolled in transitional education reading courses at conferences and reading retreats. I have also co-authored an instructor's manual for a college reading textbook.

I feel a connection with the students enrolled in the transitional education reading courses. Although I did not test into any transitional courses, I struggled academically with courses that others may have considered very basic such as math. Since the successful completion of the increasingly demanding levels of math courses were a requirement in attaining my college degrees, I had to overcome these challenges by exerting more study time for the math courses, seeking the assistance from math tutors, and meeting with the math professors during their office hours for tutoring.

On the other hand, the bias can be negative because my closeness to the subject can lead to strong, but not necessarily accurate, views regarding some of the issues. My key task as a researcher is to maintain my subjectivity to uphold the validity and integrity of the study. As a researcher, I have to ensure that my experiences do not influence the data or results.

Managing Qualitative Data

A system to organize and manage the data was developed early in the research process. As Merriam (2009) noted, data collection and analysis are simultaneous parts of an ongoing process. The data was managed through the researcher's taking notes and audio taping the interviews with the study participants. Existing data such as college catalog, student newspaper, college placement practice test booklet, and college statistics were collected, reviewed, and inventoried. The researcher also kept electronic and hard copies of the existing data in a separate, secure location.

Trustworthiness and Validity of the Study

Trustworthiness refers to the "concept of validity" of the data analysis (Roberts, 2010, p. 161). Several strategies were used to enhance the trustworthiness so the reader can assess the validity or credibility of the exploratory study. The strategies included: the use of a rich description, data triangulation as well as a peer review. Another strategy to enhance the trustworthiness of the study was the reduction of researcher subjectivity.

First, to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the findings provided rich thick description. For data to be considered rich, it must be detailed and provide a picture of what is happening in the study (Maxwell, 2005). The rich description was derived from interviews with verbatim transcripts based upon "detailed, descriptive note taking"

(Maxwell, 2005, p. 110). Additionally, the rich description depicted the context, participants, and activities of interest, as well as data in the forms of quotations from documents, notes, and participant interviews (Merriam, 2009).

Second, to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation of data was achieved through the use of multiple sources of data. The sources of data will include documents such as the college catalog, student newspaper, college placement practice test booklet, and interviews. Additionally, students from different campuses and extension centers were sampled, which provided diversity of campus contexts. The triangulation of data from multiple sources of data allowed for a comparison and cross check to build the validity of the study. Triangulation has been described as a vital strategy to build validity:

> This strategy reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating. (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 93-94)

Interviews were also a source of data for triangulation. The interviews with the students were conducted during the semester. The interviews were conducted with a convenience sampling of 20 students from eight transitional education reading classes. The researcher generated notes during the study to reflect on the reactions from the interviews.

As a means of strengthening the trustworthiness from the interviews, the researcher also employed member check or respondent validation. After the interviews, the researcher emailed the interview transcripts to the study participants to ensure the transcripts accurately reflected what the study participants said in the interviews. None of the study participants objected to the accuracy of what they said in the interview

transcripts. Maxwell (2005) noted the importance of respondent validation (e.g., member check):

> This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you have observed. (p. 111)

The third strategy to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher had a peer reviewer to conduct an examination of the data. The peer reviewer was a faculty member selected from the reading department in the community college. The peer reviewer had over 15 years teaching transitional education reading courses and was therefore knowledgeable about the research topic, data, and methodology. The peer reviewer independently coded the same qualitative data and note emerging codes, themes, and categories from two interview transcripts. Then, the peer reviewer and researcher met to compare their findings. In nearly all cases, the peer reviewer and researcher matched for codes and themes. If there was a case of disagreement, the peer reviewer and researcher discussed the case and reached a solution. The overall process of the peer review strengthened the trustworthiness of the study.

A final strategy to build trustworthiness was to reduce the subjectivity. In order to accomplish this goal, the researcher provided a subjectivity statement related to possible bias in the researcher. The researcher may have some biases associated with almost 20 years of teaching transitional education reading courses. The researcher has knowledge of the overall student characteristics for the population of students who take courses, the college where the classes are held, and how to teach the course.

In summary, there were multiple strategies to build the trustworthiness of the study. The study included a rich description based upon the notes. Triangulation of the

data was achieved through the use of multiple sources of information, such as existing data and interviews. In addition, there was a member check and peer review. Lastly, the subjectivity statement by the researcher has been provided to reveal any potential biases and to reduce researcher subjectivity. These strategies were employed so the reader can trust the data analysis of this exploratory study.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

The potential risks to the participants lie in the possibility of their self-esteem's being diminished as a result of their being part of a study focused upon their enrollment in a course for underprepared college students. To minimize the risk to the participants, the researcher did not ask questions suggesting that placement in a transitional education reading course represented a negative experience. Precautions were taken to ensure informed consent: There was a written consent form, using easily understood language, which was read to assist participants who are auditory learners. Both methods, written and oral communication, were conducted to enhance the participant's understanding of the consent form.

To minimize risk of breach of confidentiality the following methods was employed: privacy was assured for the subject because the interview materials and content collected through audio tapes and notes was kept in a secure location. The respondents' information was protected through the use of pseudonyms, thereby meeting the requirement for research involving human subjects.

To protect confidentiality, audiotapes, and transcripts were placed in sealed envelopes and was kept in a locked-boxes for one year after the interviews are conducted. There was digital and hard copy of the interview transcripts. There was a digital firewall to protect the data. The data and key was kept in separate, secured locations.

The student names did not appear in the interview transcript. The interview transcript was reviewed by the researcher and the dissertation chair. A transcriptionist was hired to confidentially transcribe the audiotapes. Within one year after the interviews are transcribed, identifying data and codes were removed.

To address ethical issues, such as personal conflicts of interest and personal bias that could influence the research, the researcher interviewed participants from transitional education reading classes that were not located on the campus where the researcher teaches. Also, the researcher made sure that none of the study participants were her former students. Further, the researcher ensured triangulation of the data through the use of multiple sources such as interviews and documents.

Additional Design Issues

A design issue for the researcher involved the logistics of interviewing students when they were available outside class time. It was difficult to do so because students have different times of availability. To accommodate the varied times of availability, the researcher spread the interviews over several days and weeks at different time periods, including meeting with study participants before or after class.

Pilot Testing

The pilot interview provided the practice needed to ensure that the questions were worded in language that was clear to the study participants so that they could provide the

information needed to answer the research questions. The researcher conducted a pilot interview with a former student during the fall semester in 2011. The researcher needed to make several changes to the protocol based on the pilot interview. First, the researcher did not probe some of the responses to the questions due to the time restraint. For example, the pilot interviewee and researcher were under a time restraint because the pilot interviewee only had 30 minutes for the interview because there was another commitment. Therefore, the researcher needed to plan at least 45 minutes to an hour instead of 30 minutes for the interview. This additional time should allow the researcher to cover all the components of the interview. Second, the researcher needed to revise the wording of the questions. For instance, for several questions the pilot interviewee asked the researcher to explain the meaning of some words or phrases. Because the researcher had to rephrase some of the questions, it became apparent that some of the questions were not clear to the pilot interviewee. Third, if there is another pilot interview before the study, the pilot interview should be with someone other than a former student. To illustrate, when asked questions about college experience and previous courses, the pilot interviewee said complimentary things about taking the researcher's class and how it helped to prepare for other classes. That comment may have been true, or the student may have been responding personally to the researcher. Therefore, to decrease the chances of interviewer's effect, the pilot interviewee should not be a former student.

Summary

In Chapter III, the methodology used and the paradigm of inquiry rationale for employing qualitative research design are outlined and discussed. The theoretical perspectives that provided the framework for the study of students enrolled in transitional

education reading courses are described. The details for the methodology used, including site selection, participant selection, and data collection processes, are discussed. The semistructured interview guide and interview protocol are outlined. The details for the qualitative data analysis, presentation, and management are provided. The chapter also includes discussion of the strategies to build the trustworthiness and validity of the study, such as the triangulation of data. The chapter concludes with the discussion of human participants and ethics precautions, design issues, and pilot testing.

Chapter IV

Findings

This study examined perceptions of intelligence and self-efficacy of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in a community college. While there are empirical studies that focus on students enrolled in transitional education courses, this is the first study to do an exploratory study with a qualitative approach on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in a community college with a focus on their perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy. The central research question was: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey? The central research question was supported by a subset of four research questions that are important for addressing the central research question as it relates to students' educational journeys. The subset of research questions included: (a) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their intelligence? (b) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive the intelligence of their classmates and

students exempt from the reading course? (c) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive others' perceptions of their own intelligence (the college staff, faculty, peers, family, society)? (d) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their academic self-efficacy? To complete this research study, the researcher conducted a qualitative research methodology as outlined in Chapter III. The research study entailed interviewing a total of 20 study participants as well as data analysis of the college catalog, student newspaper, the college placement test practice booklet. The interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview guide. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the study participants. Chapter IV described the findings and Chapter V contains the interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations.

Collecting Data

Site Selection

The site selection for the study is a three-campus community college in the greater suburban area of a southeastern state in the United States. Initially, the site selection consisted of two campuses that were established as separate community colleges opened in fall 1957. A third community college with its campus in a suburban area opened in 1971. On October 1, 1998, state legislation restructured the county's three community colleges into a single-college, multi-campus institution. One campus has century-old historic buildings that stand alongside modern classroom facilities, featuring the latest in learning technologies. Another campus has signature gardens that serve as living classrooms for students and areas of tranquil beauty for campus visitors. The third

campus is located on a beautifully maintained 147-acre property. In addition to the three campuses, the selection site also has three extension centers that offer a wide array of courses and resources for its students. The institution is a commuter college with no residential facilities, but with the three campuses and three extension centers, it is conveniently located and accessible by public transportation. The site selection has an enrollment of more than 65,000 students, and is one of the largest community colleges in the state. Additionally, it offers more than 100 associate-degree and certificate programs.

The visit to the site selection occurred over a five-month period covering four semesters; spring, summer session 1, summer session 2, and fall semester in 2013. It was necessary to extend the recruitment and interviews over the four semesters in order to reach data saturation. The researcher visited the campuses and one of the three extension centers to conduct the interviews. All 20 study participants were interviewed in person in a private location on campus or at the extension center.

Participants

To participate in the study, participants had to be: (a) at least 18 years of age, (b) enrolled in College Reading II classes, and (c) enrolled at the selected community college. None of the study participants were former students of the researcher. Also, none of the study participants were enrolled in the College Reading II class on the same campus where the researcher is located. A total of 20 study participants from eight different sections of transitional education reading courses were interviewed. Students from more than 12 sections were invited to participate in the study, but many students chose not to participate or did not meet the selection criteria. On average, there were approximately two to three study participants from each of the eight sections. All of the

study participants were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. A total list of the study participants with the pseudonyms, gender, as well as whether or not they were taking other transitional education courses is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: List of Study Participants

Pseudo Name	Gender	Other Transitional Education Classes
April	Female	Yes
Bill	Male	Yes
Charles	Male	Yes
Dave	Male	Yes
Esther	Female	Yes
Fred	Male	Yes
George	Male	Yes
Heather	Female	Yes
Ike	Male	Yes
Jake	Male	Yes
Kirk	Male	Yes
Larry	Male	Yes
Martha	Female	Yes
Ned	Male	Yes
Olivia	Female	Yes
Peggy	Female	Yes
Quell	Female	Yes
Randy	Male	Yes
Stephanie	Female	Yes
Ulysses	Male	Yes

All of the 20 study participants reported that they were taking other transitional education courses for math, English, or both. Additionally, 19 of the 20 study participants self-reported that there was a gap immediately following the completion of high school and their enrollment in college at the selection site. For two of those 19 study participants, the gap was less than one year. For five study participants the gap was 15 years or more. The average gap for the study participants was approximately 10 years.

There were eight female and 12 male study participants. While saturation was reached at 18 interviews, the researcher continued to interview participants to confirm ideas. All interviews were conducted Monday through Friday in the morning, afternoon, or evening, upon the request of the participants. The participants were interviewed at various times during the semester such as the beginning, middle, or end of the semester. The average length of the interview was 27 minutes and the range was from 13-60 minutes, which did not include the time reading and thoroughly reviewing the consent form. At times, it may take 10-15 minutes to review the consent form and answer any questions from the participants before the interview could start. Only students enrolled in College Reading II classes were interviewed because they may have a bigger and longer experience if they passed College Reading I before enrolled in College Reading II.

Participant Profiles

The profiles of the participants described information from the interviews and the researcher's observations since the participants did not have to provide detailed personal information such as their age or complete an information form. The participant profiles were presented as background information for understanding the participants' experiences and journeys to enrollment in a transitional educational reading class. The participant profiles indicated participant's age, when voluntarily reported, and additional transitional education classes. The brief synopsis provides a glimpse of each study participant based on observations made during the interview.

April. April, 24, seemed motivated to reach her goals and be a good mother. She was engaged to the father of her two children, a five-year-old daughter and another daughter expected soon. April was placed in transitional education English and math.

Bill. Bill, 19, seemed reserved and hesitant when talking about other people. He was born in a state other than that of the community college. Bill was active in bike racing, surfing, snowboarding, and playing in a band. Bill was placed in transitional education math.

Charles. Charles, 55, seemed friendly and talked primarily about his religion and faith. He quit school in the tenth grade, but later earned his GED and served in the military. Charles was placed in transitional education English.

Dave. Dave, 19, attributed his difficulty sitting in class for several hours to his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Dave was placed in transitional education math.

Esther. Esther, 27, had a with a four year-old son. She seemed very open and direct in her responses, mentioning her DUI and her participation in an Alcoholics Anonymous program. Esther was placed in transitional education English.

Fred. Fred, 49, had adult children and was recently laid off from a long-term job at a company that is now bankrupt. He served in the military. Fred was placed in transitional education math.

George. George, 29, had daughters. In addition to college, he worked both a full-time job and a part-time job. George was placed in transitional education English and math.

Heather. Heather, 30, married with three children. Heather seemed artist-like in her appearance with colorful hair, and mentioned that she wanted to attend an art institute to study photography after she graduates from the community college. Heather was placed in transitional education English and math.

Ike. Ike was born in a state other than that of the community college. He was very articulate in his responses. Ike discussed various careers and difficulties with depression, alcoholism, and drugs. Ike served in the military. Ike was placed in transitional education math.

Jake. Jake had one adult son and two grandchildren. He served in the military and was a disabled veteran. Jake seemed driven to succeed in spite of the people he said were negative in his life who thought that he was too old to attend college. Jake was placed in transitional education English.

Kirk. Kirk, 21, works a full-time job to pay out-of-pocket for his college education. Kirk was placed in transitional education English and math.

Larry. Larry, 21, was hesitant in answering questions and seemed disappointed that he is not further along in his education. He spent most of his youth in boarding schools away from his parents. Larry was placed in transitional education math.

Martha. Martha, 24, had three children, ages two, three, and five. Throughout the interview Martha discussed her religious faith and her desire to help others. Martha was placed in transitional education English and math.

Ned. Ned was married for nearly 30 years, but is now divorced. He mentioned that his son died. He seemed hesitant and apprehensive in the beginning of the interview when responding to questions. Ned served in the military. Ned was placed in transitional education English and math.

Olivia. Olivia had three children, a 15-year-old son and two younger children. She was born in a state other than that of the community college. She recently received her GED. Olivia was placed in transitional education math.

Peggy. Peggy lived with her grandmother when she was younger, but her older sister mainly took care of her and her younger brother. She seemed very focused and determined to achieve her goals. Peggy was placed in transitional education math.

Quell. Quell seemed very upbeat and friendly during the interview. Quell served in the military. Quell was placed in transitional education math.

Randy. Randy had an identical twin brother, but did not talk about him much during the interview. He lived with his aunt in another state, but moved back to the area to be near his family and now lives with his father. His mother also lives in the area. Randy was placed in transitional education English and math.

Stephanie. Stephanie, 42, had two children, one of whom is in seventh grade. Stephanie was recently laid off from her job. She served in the military. Stephanie was placed in transitional education English and math.

Ulysses. Ulysses, 25, had an infant son. Ulysses was articulate and openly answered the questions. After the interview he seemed self-conscious and asked if his responses were helpful. Ulysses was placed in transitional education English and math.

In addition to the transcripts from the 20 interviews, the college catalog, student newspaper, and college placement test booklet were analyzed. The documents provided context for the study. The college catalog is available to students in the community college 24/7 online as a link in the student portal. On the college catalog site, there are

links to areas such as general education requirements, programs of study, code of conduct, enrollment policies and services, financial aid, and student support services. In the link for student support services, students can access the sites for resources such as the libraries, bookstores, student success centers, tutoring, disabilities services, student life, and academic advisement.

The community college also has a student newspaper. The student newspaper is available as a paper version and online. The spring and summer 2013 edition of the student newspaper covered a range of topics such as an update from the college president, student led community projects, a new law that help veterans gain academic credits, new federal financial aid requirements, and campus resources.

Themes

The themes were connected to the purpose of the study which examined perceptions of intelligence and self-efficacy of the participants enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. Additionally, the themes were relevant to the significance of the study which investigated the elements of participants' experiences in their educational journey. Sixteen themes were identified to answer the primary research question and subset of research questions. The research questions and themes are identified in Table 3.

Table 3 List of Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes
Research Question 1: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey?	-Students Felt the Gap Before Enrollment in College Negatively Affected College Placement Test Scores and Contributed to Transitional Challenges -Students Acknowledged Life-Changing Events Resulted in the Decision to Enroll in College -Students Felt Their Family and Faith Played Significant Roles in Their Support Network -Students Felt Advising was Not Helpful in Navigating the Complexities of Enrollment in Transitional Education Courses
Sub-Research Question A: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their intelligence?	-Students Felt Results on Reading Placement Test were Not a Reflection of Their Intelligence -Students Acknowledged that They were Not Prepared for College -Lack of Prior Reading Comprehension Skills Negatively Affected Students' Perception of Their Intelligence
Sub-Research Question B: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive the intelligence of their classmates and students exempt from the course?	-Students Perceived the Intelligence of Their Classmates based on Classmates' Effort -Students Felt that Other Students Exempt from the Reading Course Benefited from Good Parenting and Inherent Intelligence - Students Felt that Other Students Exempt from the Reading Course Put Forth More Effort and Did Not Have an Enrollment Gap
Sub-Research Question C: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive other's perceptions of their own intelligence (the college staff, faculty, peers, family, society)?	-Students Felt that Their Family and Peers Held a High Regard of Their Intelligence -Students Felt the Faculty Held a Perception of Their Intelligence based on Their Academic Interactions -Students Felt College Staff and People in Society Did Not Know Them Well Enough to Form a Perception of Their Intelligence
Sub-Research Question D: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their academic self-efficacy?	-Students Perceived that They Would Do Better in College if They Practiced Good Study Skills and Attended Class -Students Perceived that Their Performance in Reading Class Would Help Them Do Better in Future College-Level Courses -Students had Goals Related to Their Careers that Required a College Degree

Findings

Research Question One: How and in What Ways Do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Describe Their Educational Journey?

This research question is important because it examined the key elements in the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses. Participants embarked on their educational journey with the enrollment in a transitional education reading course that was based on not meeting a cutoff score on a college placement test. Thus, the participants had unique challenges to overcome during their educational journey. An understanding of the key elements as described by the participants provided an insight into their educational journey.

From the data analysis yielded, there were four themes that answered research question one about how and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey. One theme addressed the participants' feeling that the gap between completion of high school and enrollment in college contributed to their low college placement test scores and transitional challenges. Participants perceived that during the time when they were focused on raising their children, working, or pursuing other interests that did not involve formal education, it created challenges for them when they enrolled in college. The second theme described the participants' life-changing events that resulted in their decision to enroll in college. The life-changing events centered on children, the economy, and military education benefits. The third theme pertains to the participants' feelings that their family, particularly their mothers and children and religious faith played significant

roles in their support network. The support network provided the motivation and resources for participants to pursue a college degree. The fourth theme focuses on the issue of participants enrolled in transitional education reading classes also placed in other transitional education classes. The enrollment in multiple transitional education courses created additional challenges in the area of academic advising for the participants. In all of these cases, life-changing events were the impetus to enroll in college, thereby closing the gap between enrollments in educational institutions. During the enrollment process, the participants were placed in transitional education classes. Their support network is vital in navigating this transitional stage in their lives. These themes are interrelated and together provided an answer to the research question about the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses.

Students felt the gap before enrollment in college negatively affected the college placement test scores and contributed to transitional challenges. Nearly every participant self-reported a gap between the last educational institution that they attended and enrollment in the community college. The gap ranged from less than one year to more than 40 years. Participants had a variety of reasons for not enrolling in college immediately after high school such as concentrating on full-time employment, enlisting in the military or raising children. Participants described how the gap was a challenge in their educational journey. Some of the challenges that the participants expressed were the result of the gap included loss of knowledge and difficulty adjusting to the demands of college. Participants felt these challenges negatively affected their college placement test scores and adjustment to college.

Participants attributed the difficulty in scoring high enough on the college

placement test to be exempt from transitional education reading class to the gap in the enrollment after the completion of high school. George explained that he tested into the reading class because, “I think probably because of me - you know stopping for a while and, and me probably just losing some of my knowledge and skills somewhat from just working and being out and doing different things besides school.” Similarly, Jake felt that the gap contributed to his low score on the college placement test, “I didn't like the scores...I've been out of out of school for maybe about 15 years. And I felt as if I could do better. So, they asked me if I wanted to retest and I did. And I still wasn't satisfied with my scores.” Ned also felt that he was not prepared for the college placement test because of the gap in his education:

> I wish I could've done it twenty years ago you know because you're, I guess a person of my age or whatever you know you're more prepared for those type of answers and things of that and the longer you wait the more difficult it seems like you have to apply yourself to those things.

In addition to the gap making the college placement test challenging for participants, it also made the transition to college difficult. Charles mentioned on at least four occasions during the interview that he has been out of school for 40 years, but he was optimistic. He explained:

> I wasn't prepared. I said, "Holy camoly! This ain't gonna happen for me. It's way too much for me. Way too much. Been outta school too long." You know all those little things came to mind. Been outta school for years. You know they are demanding all kinds of things and getting reading and English confused. And I don't know what they really want. I'm not going to be able to do this. And I think I'm gonna quit. But I didn't. ‘Cause like I said after 40 years of not being in school, I'm not sure what's going on. But I wanted to learn.

The participants provided examples on why the gap before enrollment in the community college was a significant component of their educational journey. They

discussed how they perceived that the gap was connected to their loss of memory which negatively affected their college placement test scores. As a result of not meeting the cutoff score on the college placement test, the participants were required to enroll in the transitional education reading class. The participants also talked about how the gap contributed to their transitional challenges in college.

Students acknowledged life-changing events resulted in the decision to enroll in college. During the gap, participants were engaged in other aspects of their lives when a life-changing event occurred that galvanized their decision to enroll in college. Though various life-changing events initiated this decision, most participants discussed life-changing events in the areas of children, problems in the economy, and the military education benefits for attending college. During these life-changing events, some participants were encouraged by people in their lives to consider college as a possible solution to their situations. These life-changing events motivated the participants to decide that now was the time to enroll in college and resume their educational journey. Participants perceived that ultimately this educational journey would result in a college degree that would afford them the opportunity to pursue their career goals. Participants perceived that their new careers would provide for a better quality of life for them and their families.

Participants talked about their children as a life-changing event behind the decision to

enroll in college. Esther talked about her decision to return to college. Esther said, “I'm back at the age of 27. I haven't been here since I was eighteen and now my life has changed. Now that I have a son, he's 4, so I want a better life for my son first and

myself."

Sometimes older children motivated their parents, such as when Jake's adult son encouraged him to enroll in college. Jake described the conversation with his son when asked about his decision to enroll in college:

> Strangely enough my son. He's head of [Store X] in Washington D.C. He's district manager. He makes quite a bit of money. And he was like, one day we were having a conversation and he said "Dad", he said "I get my intelligence from you." He said, "Why don't you go 'head and get certified so that you can you know make more money and do more…get paid for doing what you like to do?" And it just made sense to me.

Participants also talked about how problems in the economy created life-changing events that compelled them to enroll in college. Olivia made some changes in her life due to, "The economy. Plus, I want to better myself too. So, I went back and got my GED in October."

Stephanie worked in a communications career and was promoted several times, but as she said, "Unfortunately, I was laid off." Problems in the economy also effected Fred's employment and motivated him to enroll in college:

> Well, I'm a recent employee at company B... I left school. I went into the military. I did not pursue college after school. I wish I would have because, you know, it's been 30 years since I've been in high school. And my company went bankrupt and now I'm having to find myself having to go back to school. And, of course, I won't make the money that I was making, but making something that's close to what I was making.

Participants also discussed the role of the military as the life-changing event in their

decision to enroll in college. Ike said, "Decided to use the VA to enroll back in school." Participants also mentioned that the current presidential administration created additional military education benefits that afforded them the opportunities to enroll in college. Ned

described the new military education benefits:

> Money is out there paying for us to do some things I guess since Obama's in office. Well, they [Veterans Affairs' education benefit programs] have it's different chapters one's called the GI Bill the other one's is called post-911 and the other one is called, B rapid is another one it's, they go on and on.

Quell also made a decision to enroll after learning about the new military education benefits. She described how she happened upon the new military education benefits:

> So, I said "Well social services got me in a program called One Choice." I went to One Choice and they ran my social security number, my records. Found out I was a veteran. Cause they never knew I was. They said, "Well what you want to do?" I said, "Well right now I'm disabled. I can't do anything." They said, "Well try your hand. Use your veteran status. Let's see where that gets you." I say, "You think?" And they say, "Try." So, one day I came up to this college. I say, "Well I'm going to veterans first. I'm not even going to go to financial aid." I went in, see the man, and they say, "Why are you here?" I said, "Well I want to go to college here." He said, "Have you ever been somewhere else?" I say, "Yes." They say, "Where?" I say, "Here." They say, "You been a veteran?" I say "Yes, here's my forms." They pulled it out. They say, "What you want to be?" I told em what I wanted to be. They said, "Did you know that our President has signed some forms to send ya'll to college?" I say, "You are kidding." They said, "It was all on the news."

While there were various life-changing events that galvanized the participants to decide that now was the optimal time to enroll in college, most of the life-changing events were related to participants' children, problems in the economy, and the military education benefits. The participants detailed the life-changing events that resulted in their decision to enroll in college. Ultimately, while the life-changing events may vary for the participants, but the common outcome was that all the participants embarked on their educational journey in the community college.

Students felt their family and faith played a significant role in their support network. Participants had a support network that often branched out in different

directions. The participants felt that family, friends, and significant others were the 'village' in their support network. While various family members comprised a strong support network, participants focused their comments on the support and motivation that they received from their mothers and children. Participants also expressed that their mothers were their strongest advocates for pursuing a higher education degree. However, for some participants since their mothers passed away, they now felt a significant loss in their support network. Participants also talked about their strong belief in their religious faith as a support network. Their religious faith, along with other members of their faith, supported them on their road to college success. The support network played a significant role in motivating the participants in their educational journey.

While the support network included family, friends, and significant others, interestingly enough participants expressed that their greatest motivators and supporters were their children, ages ranging from infant to adult. Ulysses, whose son was less than one-year-old, said, "He himself he doesn't know that he supports me. Just himself is something that help me want to be successful, so I look at that as a vicarious source of support." Although much older than Ulysses' baby son, Jake said his greatest supporter was his adult son. Participants also talked about how their children supported them by actively getting involved in the college experience with them. Martha discussed her five- and three–year-old children:

> I have a five-year-old in school now and he's going to kindergarten this fall. And it's so like wow. You understand what I'm saying? You wanna see they…them trying. You know 'cause they always [ask] me when I'm home now like, "Mom, are you ready for school? You got to go to school. You're running late Mom." So, it's like it's kind of cute. I have a three-year-old telling me "It's time to go to school Mom."

April seemed excited to discuss her children as her support network. She also

shared

pictures of her five-year-old daughter, taken with her cell phone, with the researcher. April explained how her five-year-old daughter motivated her and kept her on track with her college studies:

> Now, I have to say my number one is going to be my little five-year-old and the one on the way. Because I want them to know that they can do the best and anything that they want to do, just like it's my choice. It's what I want to do. I just want the best for them and they are my number pusher. They are my motivation you know. Sometimes, I might be tired, but you know I guess that's life. I'm just you know keep on going. But she's definitely, when I look into her eyes, yeah she's a mommy's girl. It's supposed to be the other way around, supposed to be daddy's girl - I heard, but no. We are best friends. She's a very good kid. She likes the fact that I am in school. "How was school today Mom?" and "How was school for you?" and she's like, "Good." So, she's happy that I'm in there and she tried. One day, she tried to help me study. She can't really read yet. I mean she knows how to read about forty words, but none of the words I know. And she's going into my flashcards and I just laugh. And I'm like it's priceless, but that's my number one pusher and motivation is my little girl.

Along with their children, some participants discussed how their mothers were their biggest supporters in the family. Participants expressed that their mothers motivated them to enroll in college. Bill stated, “My mom's been a big giant influence my whole entire life …Like most homes I haven't been in a two parent home…my mom has always been guiding me and directing so that she knows that I won’t be raised to be an idiot or something like that.” Like Bill, Stephanie emphasized the support of her mother when she said, “She's been wanting me to go to college ever since high school.”

Unfortunately, for some of the participants, the people who they perceived as their biggest supporters, their mothers, have passed away. Heather talked about how she was able to share a college experience with her mother before she passed away. Heather said, “Before my mom died I told her what my class schedule was.”

April explained how her mother's passed away, but she still felt the support of her mother from above and related a conversation that she had with her daughter:

> Yeah and like she [her daughter] never got to meet my mom, so I like was seven months [pregnant] and my mom had passed away. She got meningitis. That took a big toll on me cause I was so bummed that she didn't get to meet her. It does. And I give her pictures and really they have each other -- She has my mom's eyes. Like I have big eyes, but she has big big eyes. And my mom had gigantic beautiful eyes. And she inherited them and I'm like that's crazy how that happened and I told her that her grandmom's an angel in heaven. So when she thinks about her, she's like, "How's my grandmom up in heaven?" And I'm like it feels good to hear her say that.

Both Ike and George felt since their mothers passed away that now they were their only support network. Ike and George shared similar family backgrounds and arrived at the same realization about their support network. Both participants' mothers died and both mentioned that other family members were not interested in pursuing higher education. Ike explained:

> Don't have a really big family. Education was not important. Only to my mom who passed away. So you know, for my dad and for my brothers, but you know as far as school life, they're not. Most of 'em didn't go to school, but they don't know how to like supportive towards things that I need.

George said his mother was one of his supporters. George said:

> She passed away two years ago. I actually really don't have nobody that's like. I'm just kinda doing it off of my own motivation. It's just more of me just - because like my brothers they're definitely, not in anything against them, its just one thinks it's not really meant for him meaning he doesn't have to go 'cause I've talked to them about school and I'm real close to them and my other one he just kinda doing his thing. I'm just, I don't know what he's doing actually just sometimes he just don't feel like school is really for them and that's their choice you know I just feel like my route I wanna go, if I just, my only chance, if my best chances are to finish school. If I was to ever make it somewhere.

Participants also discussed their religious faith as an integral part of their support network. When asked about their support network, Martha stated, "Yes, well Jesus" and Quell said, "[You] Bet God is." Martha and Quell had succinct responses, but made the

statements with strong conviction in their voices. Jake talked about the church that he attended, how its members supported him as a college student and said, “I attend … this church X and they are very supportive. I have about three sisters [church members] that call me just about every day.” Charles provided more detail about the role of faith in his support network:

> I'd have to say the Lord. Because if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have done so well. If it was left up to me, I'd have gotten upset. I would have - in fact, two weeks in, I thought there's no way I can do this. This is way too much. You know they started me out with five classes. And I hadn't been to school in 40 years. And it just got too much for me. It was just like, “Oh no way. I think I'm going to quit.” And the holy spirit said to me, "You can do this." I said, "You sure?" Said, "Yeah, you can do this. I'll help you along."

Participants’ support network expanded in various directions. While the family support consisted of their spouses or significant others and other family members, the participants stressed that their mothers and children were key figures in their family support network. The participants provided examples on how their support network was there to give encouragement even the participants had self-doubts about their abilities. Additionally, participants described how their religious faith was an integral component of their support network.

Students felt advising was not helpful in navigating the complexities of placement in transitional education courses. In addition to the transitional education reading classes, all of the participants were placed in another transitional education course (see Table 2). The other transitional education course was transitional education English, transitional education math, or both. Placement in multiple transitional

education courses created additional registration complexities that required expert academic advising.

There were several complexities of placement in transitional education courses which was critical information for the participants enrolled in the courses. One complexity of placement in transitional education courses was that the some of the participants were also military veterans and needed to meet additional college guidelines to receive their military education benefits. Another complexity of placement in transitional education courses was college-level courses related to the participants' college major required the success completion of the transitional education courses. An additional complexity of placement in transitional education courses was completing the sequence of the courses.

Navigating the complexities of placement in transitional education courses required expert academic advising. Charles, who had not been in school for 40 years, strongly relied on the expertise of the academic advisors to guide his selection of classes. However, he was serviced by another student assisting in the academic advising center. Charles elaborated on his experience in being placed in five classes although he had a significant gap in formal education:

> You know when I went to the advisor. I said what do I need? They gave me an assistant that's actually going to school here. And she hooked me up with the classes. Then, she presented to the advisor. The advisor said 'yeah cool.' I didn't have a clue. Now I got five classes and, I thought after two weeks, this is way too much for me. You know. Way too much for me. But … I stuck it out. This is way too much. But I found myself getting into it. And even though I spent hours every night, hours at the computer typing up papers and doing research, whatever it may be. I learned so much about computers. I learned so much about the internet and the World Wide Web and how to get the things and how to utilize those things. And it was great. I started to get excited you know. I really did. But that was like five weeks in you know.

During the semester, the stress from being registered for so many classes started to take

its toll on Charles. He explained:

> And feeling like overstressed. You know. Actually, that's what brought all my liver problem back was stress. Because I got so stressed out the last two weeks in this one. My sleep deprivation. You know I was on the computer in the middle of the night for hours at a time. Trying to keep up. Trying to get an understanding. Trying to get everything right. And it took its course.

An additional complexity of placement in transitional education courses is that almost half of the participants self-reported that they were military veterans. As military veterans, their academic advising needed to be more specialized to help navigate not only the requirements for the college, but also the requirements to receive the military education benefits. While the community college has an in-house veteran support system, academic advisors need to also be abreast of educational resources and benefits for military veterans. For example, in the student newspaper, there was an article which detailed that the governor signed the Veterans Full Employment Act into law. As part of the law, veterans can receive credit for applicable education and training during their time in the military that can be applied towards meeting degrees, licenses, and certificates requirements. Participant Ned talked about the misinformation that he received from an advisor when he stated:

> I was taking two [classes] but I found out that the advisor that I had misled me and I don't really wanna say that, put the blame on the individual but I was told that I needed seven credits that you know to be full time, considered full time as a veteran on this, taking summer one. Needless to say I only needed four [credits] so I dropped the other one which I was doing at night. I was doing day and night.

Another complexity of enrollment in the transitional education courses is that

some of the

transitional education classes are prerequisites before a student can enroll in classes for his/her major. An option for students in this situation is to enroll in learning community courses. A learning community can occur when transitional education courses are paired with college-level courses. For example, the same students enrolled in a transitional education reading class can also be enrolled together as a cohort in a college-level course, like Sociology 101. This information about the learning community classes is vital for students enrolled in transitional education courses. Other than an academic advisor to provide information about learning communities, then a student who is unfamiliar with course options may have a difficult time accessing this information. For instance, a student who is unfamiliar with learning communities, would have to access this information through the online college catalog, then would have to know to click on the link for student support services to locate the link for learning communities.

Peggy initially accepted her placement in the transitional education reading class until she became aware of its ramifications for taking college-level classes related to her college major. Peggy explained:

> At first when they first told me, I was just like fine because I didn't know I needed to pass it - I didn't know this [transitional education reading] class was stopping me from getting into classes that had mass communications when they first told me I had to take it… But, if I woulda known then what I know now I woulda been like yeah I need to test outta that because it puts such a hold on classes I really need. 'Cause now I have to pass it to take my mass communication classes.

An additional complexity of placement in multiple transitional education courses is that the sequence of classes needed to exit is added to the participants' time to college completion. Most of the subjects for the transitional education courses, math, English, and reading had several levels in the sequence. For instance, a student who is tested at the lowest level for the transitional education math class will have to complete three

levels of math in order to reach a college-level math class.

In the community college, to assist in accelerating through the sequence of courses, some transitional education classes were combined or linked with college-level courses to accelerate the completion of the transitional education classes. The community college offered some transitional education courses as part of the accelerated learning program (ALP). In ALP, the several transitional education courses in the same subject, (lower and upper level transitional education math) could be combined in offered in one semester instead of two semesters. Another way to accelerate through the transitional education course is to pair highest level of the transitional education course with a college-level course. For example, highest level of transitional education English course is paired with college-level English 101. Participants are able to take advantage of the opportunity to accelerate the process of completing the transitional education classes to exit the sequence. Without the assistance of an academic advisor, a student may not know about the ALP program. Information about the ALP program was not easily accessible to locate after an examination of the online college catalog. In the college catalog, there was no link for information about ALP under links listed for student support services, enrollment policies and services, or developmental education and learning assistance.

Charles completed accelerated courses that combined the highest level of transitional education English with the college-level of English 101. Martha and Olivia had already registered to take two combined transitional math classes in the upcoming semester in the community college. During the time of the interview, April was completing two transitional education math classes that were combined into one

accelerated class. April explained the benefits of taking accelerated classes, “You just got to pay more attention, but it helps you out because you can get it done. A lot quicker than [in]stead of [knocks table] one way all the way all year long into another. I like to combine courses. I think I'm just a genius thing I think.” However, she expressed frustration because she said that she was not informed that she also needed to take a transitional education English class, but was happy that she could combine the class with college-level English 101. April said:

> I did meet some with the advisors. They seemed really nice. I don't think that they'd go over everything with you ‘cause after Ms. Carter's class, I realized that when I went to go register online, I needed English [transitional education class]. And no one told me that ‘cause I could have tried to pair that up with the reading classes ‘cause you could do that and no one mentioned that to me. And they knew my scores, so they just told me I need to go to reading. So, I was little bummed when I was looking and Googling the prerequisites and I'm like what - I'm like what's English [transitional education class]. I was so mad. I came to this school and I went up to the advisors office and I'm like, "Is this true?" And she was like, "You do." And I'm like, "Why didn't no one say anything to me?" I mean how - that's not my job like when I first started they could have told me. No. Nothing. They said I needed reading, so I focused on just reading. So, I was very mad that I had to take another prerequisite before I get into English 101, but thankful they are combined together. Very lucky.

Placement in transitional education courses required the expertise of academic advisors to navigate the complexities of the resources and registration options. Some of the resources could lessen the time that the participants would need to exit the sequence of the transitional education and allow them to enroll in college-level courses earlier in the educational journey. Participants expressed how they did not perceive that the academic advisors were helpful in navigating the complexities of the college process especially since they were all placed in multiple transitional education courses.

Summary. The four themes answered research question one. First, the educational journey of the participants was affected by the gap since their last enrollment at an educational institution and the community college, life-changing events, their support network, and academic advising. Nearly all of the participants self-reported a gap in their enrollment as a student in an educational institution, which many perceived created challenges in their educational journey. According to some of the participants, the time away from an educational institution had a negative influence on their college placement scores and contributed to transitional challenges. Second, life-changing events such as children, problems in the economy, and military education benefits, affected the participants' decisions to enroll in college. Additionally, participants felt that their support network played a significant role in their pursuit of a college degree. Participants described a support network that was like a "village" that consisted of family (especially mothers and children) and their religious faith. Fourth, the participants also acknowledged that a significant aspect of their educational journey was placement in multiple transitional education classes and academic advising. Enrollment in transitional education courses incurred complexities such as also meeting the guidelines to receive military education benefits, not being able to enroll in college major courses, and the additional time added to complete the sequence of courses. Navigating the complexities required the expertise of an academic advisor. After the life-changing events that resulted in their college enrollment, participants often encountered challenges due to their prolonged absence from educational institutions and some misinformation that they received from academic advising. However, the participants were optimistic that with

their support network, they could overcome these challenges on their educational journey.

Sub-Research Question A: How and in What Ways Do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive Their Intelligence?

The sub-research question A is important because it examined the perceptions that the participants have about their own intelligence. The participants' preparation for college-level coursework was tested by the administration of a college placement test. Not scoring high enough to meet the minimal cutoff score to be exempt from the transitional education reading class affected the participants' perception of their intelligence. Lack of reading comprehension skills and the placement in the transitional education reading class were significant in the participants' perception of their intelligence.

The data analysis yielded three themes that answered sub-research question A about how and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their intelligence. One theme suggested that the reading placement test did not reflect the study participants' perception of their intelligence. The second theme explored participants' acknowledgement that they lacked adequate preparation for college-level coursework. The third theme addressed the participants' negative perception of their intelligence due to their lack of reading comprehension skills. Together these three themes answered the sub-research question about how the study participants perceived their intelligence.

Students felt results on reading placement test were not a reflection of their intelligence. College placement tests are an essential component of the enrollment process for many colleges and universities. These tests are often used to determine whether students need additional supplemental courses before enrolling in college-level courses. Based on their scores for the reading section of the college placement tests, all of the study participants were placed in a transitional education reading class. Although they were enrolled in this prerequisite class to improve their reading comprehension skills, many of the study participants did not perceive that the test results were an indication of their intelligence. Furthermore, they did not want others to perceive that enrollment in the class was a reflection of their intelligence.

All of the study participants except for one participant, Charles, were placed in the transitional education reading class because they did not perform high enough to earn exemption. Charles scored high enough to be exempt, but stated that he told his advisor, "It's been 40 years since I've been to school. You start me at the bottom. Let me work my way up because I don't want to get into something and be completely confused."

Many participants indicated that they did not consider the test an accurate indication of their intelligence because they did not perform to the best of their abilities. Some of the explanations provided by the study participants included test anxiety, uninteresting stories in the reading test, and a lack of necessary correctional glasses. The participants stressed that their placement in the transitional education reading class was not a reflection of their intelligence. Martha seemed confident throughout the interview and direct in her responses when she explained her consideration of the college placement test results:

> One, I was moving fast. Two, the stories was so boring. So, I did I like YouTube videos. I did whatever I can do to kind of prepare for it. They also give you a study guide, so I kinda went through my reading and my English on that. And try to see where I was placed. I did really good. I had a couple here and there, but, um, other than that I did really good. It's just maybe it was just rushing and also being that if it's something that doesn't interest me, I totally lose train of thought. But, you know I am prepared and I'm ready. I feel I am very intelligent.

April said, “It's reading and I'm not stupid like that's what just makes - I guess that's what people think when they take the test. You think, "Wow, am I really like...I can read, I'm not dumb.” [laughs] April may have laughed in her response, but she reiterated:

> I was just bummed, period, that I placed pretty bad, but got to move on I mean take it and get going. I was a little bummed at first, but I was like - ‘cause I - it was just so - It was just easy to me. Well, I felt like I was beyond stupid, but I know I'm not. And I knew I was smarter than that.

Several participants expressed concerns about other people perception that enrollment in transitional education reading class reflected their intelligence. Some participants, like Jake, did not tell others about their enrollment in the class. Jake did not discuss his college placement test results and enrollment in the transitional education reading class with his son, who encouraged him to enroll in college, or the members of his church whom he considered his support network. He explained, “I was in a sense ashamed of it.” Larry had friends in college and did not tell them about his placement in the transitional education reading class because, “It's kind of embarrassing you know to tell my friends cause they're all in good colleges.”

On the other hand, Dave did tell people that he was enrolled in a transitional education reading class and noticed their negative responses, “I told a lot of people, and they kinda looked at me like I was stupid. Because they're like, ‘Dude, you're smarter than that.’’’

The participants provided examples on why they did not perceive that the college placement test for reading was a reflection of their intelligence. The participants offered various reasons why they did not meet the minimal score on the college placement test and most of the reasons were not related to their intelligence. Some of the participants did not discuss their placement because they did not want others to negatively perceive their intelligence based on their enrollment in the transitional education reading class.

Students acknowledged that they were not prepared for college. Many of the participants acknowledged that they were personally motivated and prepared to attend college. Due to the life-changing events in their lives, participants perceived that now was the right time in their lives to embark on their educational journey. Yet, after enrollment in college, they admitted that they were not academically prepared for the rigors of college-level courses when they first started. Participants perceived that one of main contributing factors for not being academically prepared for college was the lack of college preparation they received at their high schools. Although the participants perceived that they were not academically prepared for college, they were optimistic that they would become prepared.

A few participants attributed this lack of preparation for college to attending a high school that was not academically demanding. George and April provided different explanations for why they felt that their high schools did not prepare them. Although April stated that she did well in high school and was an honor student, she described her high school as a place where students were passed along. As April explained:

> So, I mean, you hear now a lot of days high school just passes you kinda on. Doesn't really give you that push. So, I think the high schools need to do better with that because I kinda feel like maybe that's what they did with me too.

Similarly George stated that his high school also seemed to pass students along, but mainly because of disciplinary issues. George seemed hesitant to talk negatively about high school, but explained in detail how the disciplinary issues affected his learning:

> Unfortunately based on which school I went to High School X [laughs], I don't think I was really well prepared far as like – 'cause the - classes there, I mean I don't like to talk about it but it just wasn't teachers really. It was always something going on as far as a fight or something like or kids talking and teachers can't get control of them. That's what I remember of high school. And it just, I really didn't learn too much there [laughs]. They were doing more in disciplining and it was like a nightmare there. It wasn't - I'm being honest - High School X - I mean I, I had to be honest about it. If I did feel it was a good place, I would've said it but it's just - I, it was more like I was just, they were passing people to get them outta the class in a sense.

Even though they lacked preparedness, they maintained a positive outlook. Jake described his decision to enroll even though he did not feel fully prepared, "No, but I didn't want to procrastinate about it any longer. Wasn't prepared, but I'm going to get prepared, if that makes any sense." Fred stated that he was motivated and emotionally ready for college. However, as far as college-level coursework, Fred said, "Oh. I academically - no. I don't think I was." However, since he has started utilizing the college resources, Fred added, "At first, I guess I wasn't. I guess I have become prepared. I don't know if that makes any sense or not." Interestingly, while they both expressed uncertainty, they acknowledged that they would become prepared.

While emotionally prepared to embark on their educational journey, the participants acknowledged that they were not academically prepared to attend college. According to the participants, the main reason for this lack of preparation was attributed to the high schools they attended. The participants felt that their high schools pushed them toward

graduation rather than prepared them for college. However, the participants expressed that now they were in college, they would become prepared for it.

Lack of prior reading comprehension skills negatively affected students' perception of their intelligence. Participants stated that they lacked reading comprehension skills. Participants also indicated that they did not read frequently and if they did, it was mainly (non-academic) topics that they enjoyed. In these instances, they did not build their reading comprehension skills by actively looking for the main point or main idea. The reading placement test results, which consequently placed them in the transitional education reading class, reinforced the need to improve their reading comprehension skills. While they may have been able to conceal their lack of prior reading comprehension skills prior to enrollment in college, placement in the transitional education reading class made known their deficiency in reading comprehension. Participants connected the lack of reading comprehension skills to the negative perceptions of their intelligence. Participants also used humor as a coping skill when they discussed the negative perceptions of their intelligence.

Although participants had negative feelings about their test results and reading comprehension skills, they concluded that with effort both could be improved. Bill said, "Reading is not my strongest subject. I don't read that much at home." Later, Bill elaborated about his intelligence and effort when he stated:

> I think from what I've seen from everybody I think I feel kinda dumb. What I've seen from other people I've seen that my work has been a little below average. I think I need to push forth so that I can show that I'm better than the next or I can feel as if I'm better than the next and I can accomplish more.

Kirk described his perception toward reading by stating, "I'm not much of a reader, but if I find anything I like, I read it." He also discussed his perceived

intelligence and academic effort:

> I think even though - as a college student, I think - well speaking for myself, I think. I need improvement. So, I think in a point is that's why I'm here. [laughs] So, I feel like I need improvement in every way. I'll take a challenge to improve and everything. I know I can do much better than where I am right now. And I know if I put effort to it, I'll get wherever I can reach.

Dave also acknowledged that he struggled with reading comprehension skills. He laughingly talked about his lack of reading comprehension and later his perception of his intelligence and effort when he said:

> With reading comprehension I can read a whole entire book and I can pinpoint different details in it, but I can't tell you like if I read a whole entire passage. Like, it makes it more difficult for me to uh analyze the entire text, get the answers. You know, it would be a lot easier, but instead I can't do it. So, I don't know. I kinda just got mixed up. I am not smart like that so I kind of might need some help. Like, I'm self-motivated, but at the same time, when I get down and low. When I don't get the material, when I start getting frustrated and I want to give up, but it's just the perseverance that I'm still trying to work through. And if I give up, I've just wasted all the time and all the money that was placed into it. So, it would be a big ol' waste if I stop. So, as far as to push forward, that's my main goal.

Several participants humorously acknowledged that they needed to improve their reading comprehension skills and joked about their negative perception of their intelligence. The participants seemed to feel that if the topic was lightened the use of humor and laughter it would deflect from the seriousness of their negative perceptions. However, most of the participants were optimistic about their academic success. They believed their reading skills could improve with more effort by learning the skills taught in the transitional education reading class.

Summary. The sub-research question A was answered by three themes. First, most of the study participants did not think that they performed to their highest capability on the college placement test, although most of them took the test more than once and still

tested into the transitional education reading class. The study participants stated that the test results were not a reflection of their intelligence. Second, participants admitted that they were not prepared for college-level courses when they first enrolled, even though they were emotionally prepared and motivated to attend college. Participants attributed this lack of preparedness to sub-standard high school educational experiences. Third, participants discussed their lack of reading comprehension skills. Those participants who did perceive the results reflected negatively on their intelligence often employed coping strategies like brief responses or deflection through humor to lighten the discussion.

Sub-Research Question B: How and in What Ways do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive the Intelligence of Their Classmates and Students Exempt from the Reading Course?

The sub-research question B is important because it is answered by the participants' perception about the intelligence other students and the basis for their perceptions. The participants were probed about the intelligence of two groups of students; their classmates in the transitional education reading class and students who were exempt from taking the transitional education reading classes. The perceptions are important in understanding how the participants made a determination about the intelligence of these two groups of students.

From the data analysis, three themes were identified that answer this research question. One theme discussed that the study participants held a high or low regard for their classmates intelligence based on whether or not they perceived that the classmates put forth the effort to excel in class. The second theme explored the participants' perception that students who were exempt from the prerequisite courses benefitted from

good parenting and inherent intelligence. The third theme examined the participants' perception that these students were exempt from the requirement to take the transitional education reading classes because they put forth more academic effort before enrollment in college. These themes described not only how the participants perceived the intelligence of other students but also how inherent intelligence and effort affect these perceptions.

Students Perceived the Intelligence of Their Classmates based on Classmates' Effort. Although all of the students were placed in the transitional education reading classes due to not meeting the cut-off scores on a college placement test, most of the study participants held a high regard for their classmates' intelligence. Many shared the same consideration as Ulysses when he stated, "Just the way they think. The critical thinking skills that some of them have. It kind of indicates that a lot of them are intelligent students." When the researcher probed to explore the criteria for this perception, the study participants explained that it was based on the effort the classmates put forth to excel in the class. This effort was evident through class participation and group activities.

Several participants talked about the effort that their classmates demonstrated through class participation. Bill stated, "I think their intelligence is really high…I see them in class they would answer a question instantaneously or understand their work in a heartbeat." Stephanie added, "The teacher asks questions, they give pretty good answers." Kirk agreed about the importance of class participation and stated, "You can see who is paying attention, who takes notes, who highlights."

Esther also held a high regard for her classmates' intelligence based on a class

discussion and elaborated:

> Yeah what we did today about the thesis statement or whatever some people already knew the thesis statement is supposed to be like the first or the second paragraph where I didn't know I thought maybe it was the last or whatever or their thesis they got from out of the article and I used my own thesis theme or whatever. So they knew more or maybe I didn't comprehend well and I would ask a lot of questions but they already knew so they don't have to raise their hand to ask cause they already know the answer.

Heather provided an example of the perception of the classmates' intelligence based on group activities when she explained, "They're all intelligent in their own way. We have socratic discussions and socratic seminars…a lot of group projects and hear their thoughts and opinions."

Ulysses agreed with Heather and talked about his classmates' intelligence based on the journal writing that they shared in class and stated:

> I feel that I'm in a predominately intelligent group... Just the way they think. The critical thinking skills that some of them have. It kind of indicates that a lot of them are intelligent students... You hear how they think... Journal writing every day.

Most of the study participants held their classmates' intelligence in high regard based academic effort, a few indicated that the classmates were not putting forth the effort to excel in class. Participants stated that the classroom behavior demonstrated some students' lack of academic effort and thus formed a low regard for their classmates' intelligence. Since the transitional education reading class was a prerequisite before students can enroll in many college-level courses, the classes are typically a mixture of older students returning to college and students straight out of high school or currently attending high school.

Some study participants, particularly the older participants, attributed this lack of effort to their classmates' maturity and age. Fred stated:

> Okay. I'm trying to deal with them because they're either they're younger and a lot of 'em are not ready…a lot of it's younger. They just getting out of high school, so I'm having to deal with them talking, you know, stuff like that in the background.

They also suggested that the lack of maturity of younger students accounted for their mediocre performance in class. April commented:

> You get a mixture, like I'm only 24. You get a mixture there was one as young as eighteen. You know in between there. Then, you had some that were 50 plus. You could see that the - it also depends on your maturity level, I mean. I have children, so I'm ready to learn. The younger ones were always late, not coming in; they even stopped coming. They weren't even there for the final [exam]. So, you could tell that they didn't care.

Several participants offered suggestions on how their classmates could improve their class performance through academic effort. Charles noted that poor performance was frequently due to lack of attendance, "Well, there was a great mixture. Some actually cared. Some came every, pretty much, every day. And, they participate, they listen. And some showed up whenever." Stephanie offered an alternative explanation for poor performance, "I believe they don't ask enough questions, but I believe that has to do with age and being shy and all." April reinforced these views:

> The younger ones were always late, not coming in; they even stopped coming. Like you will see all these other students like slacking or turning the wrong stuff in and I'm like give a guideline like. It's not that hard. It's not that bad. You'll see the kids goofing off, coming in, going to the bathroom, on their phones. You know you get a mixture of all that. I mean I may be on the phone once and a while, but it's always to check on my baby. It's never to be like, "Hey girl, what are you doing?" You know, what are you doing? It's a mixture of all. I mean sometimes that kind of gets annoying, but you can't help that I mean at a community college you can't help who you are going to get placed with. But, I mean I can see why people say that is annoying 'cause I mean I look at them like - and even Ms. X didn't play. She wasn't tolerating that. No. You know not listening or whatever. She'd make you leave.

Charles also postulated that these classmates were not putting forth the effort because there was no college credit for the class. When the researcher probed Charles further about why these classmates were not applying themselves, he stated:

> You know that's a really hard question because yeah most of them are young. But I don't know what they're thinking. I know it wasn't an accredited course. And I believe they were trying to put forth in the classes they were getting credit for the most effort. So, this one got the least effort because of that.

Participants based their perception of their classmates' intelligence on whether or not the classmates demonstrated academic effort to excel in the transitional education reading class. Participants provided examples of classmates' academic effort through group activities, class participation, and classroom behavior. Participants attributed their classmates' lack of effort was due to age, maturity, or because the reading class was not worth any college credits. However, the participants felt that with academic effort these classmates could improve their class performance and grades.

Students felt that other students exempt from the reading course benefited from good parenting and inherent intelligence. Study participants were questioned about their views on students who, based on the college placement test or other criteria, were not required to enroll in the transitional education reading classes and seemed to advance through college without any difficulty. Nearly all the study participants expressed good will towards these students for being exempt from taking the transitional education reading class. Some participants expressed that these students benefitted from good parenting or inherent intelligence.

Some of the study participants stated that good parenting of these students afforded them the ability excel in college and score high enough on the reading section of the college placement test so they were exempt from taking a transitional education reading class. Study participants reflected on the parenting that they received to express their perception about the connection between good parenting and intelligence. Ike mentioned his mother and father and the importance of their level of education. He

explained that his mother, now deceased, had a college degree and always considered it important to have a college degree. His father, originally from Trinidad, had a fifth-grade education, was a "self-employed entrepreneur," and did not think a college education was important. Even though he had parents from different ends of the spectrum on the importance of education, Ike illustrated his strong opinion on the topic when he said:

> Well, I mean it has a lot to do with their development of who they are. You know childhood, what type of practices they may have had prior. I know for a fact that being in a childhood of an educated system where education is important and having a childhood where education might not be that as important does affect your abilities with your college.

Esther and Heather also emphasized the important of good parenting in education. Heather stated simply, "Their parents pushed them." Esther elaborated:

> Maybe in their household maybe something strict in there or strict in their house or they like to learn a lot and read and things. I think that's why probably stuff they pick up from in the house maybe like to read on their own and like to research things or whatever and they probably have a high vocabulary. I think it has to do a lot with who you raised by so I mean some stuff is easy for people or they might just know it.

Dave offered another example of the role parents play in education when discussing why students tested out of transitional education reading classes, "Maybe they have a parent that is excessively good at English or literature and they went to their parents said, 'Hey mom hey dad I need help can you help me'." Randy felt that parents can also provide support by minimizing problems for their children. Randy stated:

> It's according to how they was raised up I mean 'cause some like they didn't have no problems, they stayed away from the crowd, they mama took them to school so they ain't have to ride the bus, and all the stuff like that I mean really if you not around problems it's more easier for you to do things.

A few of the study participants stated that these students excelled because their intelligence was based on luck or because they perceived that these students were born

with inherent intelligence. Bill and Dave both stated during their interviews that these students were "very lucky." Ike described these students as gifted when he stated, "You know some people have different gifts so, I feel like they - maybe they're just right on when it comes to reading. Where they can be stronger than we are." Another explanation was that these students were blessed by God with their intelligence. Ulysses described his view as, "I feel like they are very fortunate intellectually. Like, I feel like, you know, God has blessed them with ease in that aspect." Similarly, two study participants explained was that these students were born smart. Larry explained that "I feel like they're, they're born with it you know." Esther concurred with Larry's view, "Some people are born geniuses or whatever. It might be in their genes or whatever."

A few participants perceived that students exempt from the transitional education reading course and who seemed to advance through college without much difficulty, benefitted from good parenting and inherent intelligence. They discussed their perception that good parenting is connected to intelligence. Participants talked about their experiences with their parents and how it affected their educational journey. Participants also expressed that these students had inherent intelligent, were blessed, lucky, or gifted. In other words, these students did not have exert any academic effort, these students were just born smart.

Students felt that other students exempt from the reading course put forth more effort and did not have an enrollment gap. The majority of the study participants stated other students scored high enough on the college placement test to be exempt from the transitional education reading class for two main reasons. One reason for the exemption was that these students put forth academic efforts before enrolling in

college to allow them to excel on the college placement test. According to the study participants, the other reason for the exemption was that these students did not have a prolonged interval between the completion of high school and enrollment in college. Thus, applied academic effort and enrollment in college immediately after graduation from high school were the main reasons why other students were able to score high enough on the college placement test to be exempt from placement in a transitional education reading class.

The majority of the participants suggested that students who were exempt from transitional education reading classes and excelled in college put forth more academic effort. As stated by Kirk, "I mean - I think those people are the kind of people, they put effort to everything they do. They study and everything. They don't waste their time or anything." George even mentioned that he did his own research into students who excel in college:

> Probably, I know it'd probably be hard work, studying, you know, reading a lot I think they've they just really, really focused and they just do a lot to prepare themselves. I kinda was reading a book on it and it was saying about, actually I Googled it, about you know how students can make it through college and it just came up with different articles on it, and it was just saying, and I agree with it, one of the articles said if you know you can be a not-so-good student in the beginning and come out a really good student just based on your organization and how you study and you know it doesn't, just because one person may end up flying through doesn't mean that you can't get to that level or, you know, so I, I just look at it like they're already mastered where they are but behind the scenes it took a lot for them to get there. They had to, they didn't just wake up one morning, and they were just like, had all this knowledge.

Charles stated a similar idea that anyone can excel in college if he/she puts forth the effort. According to Charles, more effort is the only thing that distinguished these students from anyone else:

> I think they applied themselves in the beginning and continued that on. And didn't let anything else get in the way. And I applaud those people. I don't think they have anything more special than anybody else except the fact that they were serious about getting it done. You know, I see a lot of students around here. Play-time is still prominent in their life. Not class time. Play-time. They gotta stop play-time. Play-time is over. Play-school is back there. This is serious stuff now. This is about your future. Get it done. Stop playing. That's how I see it.

Participants stated that the efforts of these students, particularly in high school or before college, enabled them to achieve exemption from the transitional education reading class and excel in college. Randy, Quell, and Ulysses all expressed this idea. Ulysses said, "Maybe they paid more - they paid attention in high school." Randy stated, "When they went to high school they had focus." Quell commented, "Because it's - to me, it's what they apply. They apply a lot of things before they even come to college."

Another common explanation among participants was that attending college immediately after graduation from high school without a gap was the reason for the success of these students. Mainly the older participants commented on this academic advantage. Olivia stated, "I think mostly because some of them just graduated from school and they - it's fresh in their minds." Ulysses concurred, "Maybe they were prepared where they came straight out of high school to college. So, they didn't give themselves time to forget all the information that they obtained in the past, so they were able to you know." Another older student, Fred, added:

> Well, I think because of they go straight from school. They go straight from high school right to right into college. I think that's more beneficial. It's a lot beneficial like my daughter tested straight out. She went first from high school and straight into college. As long as there's no gap there, I think that helps you out a lot.

According to the study participants, some students scored high enough on the college placement test to be exempt from the transitional education reading course for

two main reasons, academic effort and no gap between high school and college. The participants perceived that these students applied academic effort before they entered college and thus were academically prepared to excel on the college placement test and advance to college-level courses. Also, the participants perceived that enrollment in college shortly after graduation from high school was advantageous to avoid the loss of knowledge and the need for a refresher course like the reading class.

Summary. The participants' perception of their classmates' intelligence were based on academic effort. Most of the study participants believed their classmates were intelligent because of the demonstrated academic effort through class participation and group activities. On the other hand, study participants perceived that some classmates were not performing well due to lack of academic effort. Participants perceived that academic effort was the determining factor in their classmates' class performance and grades. However, the study participants formed a perception of other students' intelligence exempt from the transitional education reading course with polarizing viewpoints. From one side of the spectrum, a few study participants suggested these other students were raised by good parents or had inherent intelligent as additional factors in collegiate success. On the other side of the spectrum, most of the participants stated that these other students who were not required to enroll in the transitional education reading courses achieved success due to academic effort and as a result of college enrollment shortly after graduation from high school.

Sub-Research Question C: How and in What Ways do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive Other's Perceptions of Their Own Intelligence (the college staff, faculty, peers, family, society)?

Sub-research question C is important because it examined how and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceived other's perceptions of their own intelligence because it is opportunity for the participants to reflect on other's perceptions instead of their own perceptions. The participants reflected on other's perceptions from three different groups; family and peers, college faculty, and people in society. By reflecting on other's perceptions of their own intelligence, participants were able to consider the ways that the three different groups formed a basis of intelligence.

The data analysis yielded three themes that answer this sub-research question C on how and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive other's perceptions of their own intelligence (the college staff, faculty, peers, family, and society). The first theme the study participants reported that other people such as their family members and peers held a high regard for the participants' intelligence. The second theme participants developed a sense of how their intelligence was perceived by the faculty through ongoing academic interactions. The third theme the study participants expressed that other people, such members of the college staff and people in society, did not know them well enough to know their level of intelligence.

Students felt that their family and peers held a high regard of their intelligence. Participants reported that the people who knew them perhaps the best,

family and peers, held a high regard for their intelligence. These participants reported that family members expressed confidence in the participants' intelligence despite the participants' doubts about their own abilities and encouraged them to excel. Participants expressed with pride that one of the reasons their family held a high regard for their intelligent was they were the first in their families to graduate from high school or attend college and thus were considered high achievers.

Even when they were having self-doubts, participants indicated that their families respected their intelligence. As Bill said, "Family treats me as if I'm smart. They treat me as if I know a little more than what I do." When faced with challenges in college, some participants received encouragement from family members who thought highly of their intelligence. For example, Martha had doubts about her ability to succeed in the classes for her major in the upcoming semester. She described the encouragement that she received from her mother:

> My mom straight up told me. She said, "You can do it." At first, I was a little bit kind of scared because I'm like all these sciences. I got to memorize all this stuff. I mean I haven't got to that point yet, but I know it's coming. Like fall, I have Biology, Anatomy & Physiology, so I know it's coming. And I'm like, "Oh God what did I get myself into?" Like my mom [said] "Let me tell you something - you can do it. Okay. It's not that complicated you can do it."

Randy indicated that he decided to enroll in college part-time in order to get a job and recalled that his mother thought that he was intelligent enough to take on more challenges. Randy elaborated:

> I mean my momma, my mom feels like I coulda did something more than part time. She didn't want me to be part time. She want me to be full time 'cause she know what she said that I got the smartness to do anything. She said go for my credits full, don't do part and then gotta go full [time].

Some participants explained that they were perceived as intelligent by their family members because they were the first generation of college students in the family. In some cases, participants were also among the few or only high school graduates in their families. April said, “But from either one of my parents, they didn't even make it pass high school, so I feel I'm doing better than them so...they didn't even graduate high school.” Ulysses talked about how he has surpassed most of his family members academically:

> And I'm only 25 and I have a lot - I have family that are a lot older than me. I'm the first high school graduate and I'm hoping to be the first college graduate. So, they look at that. They see that. You know he's the first one to walk across the stage. You know. They look at me as intelligent. All of them has expressed that to me you know you're a bright smart guy. I've never been incarcerated. You know. They all they look up - my family look up to me. When they see me they're proud of me. They're proud to say that I'm their family member.

Participants reported that their family members believed they were intelligent due to their verbal skills, as manifested by speech, grammar, and vocabulary. According to Dave:

> They say that I have like very good grammar, but at the same time, like how I use it, it does get me you know further because I know how to talk to people. And like my mom, she always said I had a very good vocabulary. And it just gets - it's hard. I guess. You know? But how they feel I have a good understanding or anything like that. They feel as if I continue in English that, because I enjoy writing, that I could be an author someday or a public speaker.

Heather revealed that her future husband thought she was intelligent while they were dating:

> My husband thinks I'm highly intelligent because I can answer a-squared plus b-squared. I know that sounds funny and I'm not a math person. Yes, that's his requirement for me dating him if I can answer that simple math question which come to find out a lot of the population cannot answer, but when I answered it to c to the third I rethought about it for a minute, I was like no its c-squared and for the fact that I thought about it and I corrected it and just didn't leave it at that, that's what…makes him think I'm intelligent.

Participants expressed that their family and peers held a high regard for their intelligence. Some participants perceived that they attained this high regard in their families because they were the first to graduate from high school or attend college. As the first in their families to attend college, they were considered the high achievers. Participants reflected on how their family's high regard for their intelligence motivated them when they had self-doubts about their intelligence. Participants provided examples of the importance of this belief in their intelligence from their family when they faced challenges in college.

Students felt the faculty held a perception of their intelligence based on their academic interactions. The participants based their perception of whether or not their reading instructors held their intelligence in high or low regard on their academic interactions with faculty, mainly during class participation. Participants perceived that their reading instructors considered them intelligent based on their positive interactions such as when the participants added valuable insight during class discussion or answered questions correctly. If the interactions with the reading instructors were negative, for various reasons such as the participants did not have smooth transition adjusting to the college life, then the participants perceived that the instructors did not consider them intelligent. Although reading instructors have formal assessments available to them through tests, quizzes, homework and/or class assignment grades, the participants based their perception on how the reading instructors perceived their intelligence on academic interactions.

According to the participants, reading instructors based their perceptions of intelligence on these interactions rather than focusing primarily on grades. For example,

Heather said, “Oh, I think they perceive me highly intelligent not intelligent because I have a 97 [average] in the class, but because I constantly participate.” Ulysses expressed that his reading instructor thought highly of his intelligence based on his creativity, “I've been told by my professors that you know I'm very creative thinker. I think maybe they think I am intelligent.”

Ike based his perception of the faculty’s consideration of his intelligence on his “worldly experience”:

> I think they, you know so far they have - they give me a lot of like respect. They understand, you know, I'm very knowledgeable about things because of my worldly experience of traveling…we interact very much, but they identify. You know. Make me feel like you know they value my points.

Martha discussed her family background of professionals and indicated that she believed that her instructors encouraged her because they knew that she had the potential to excel in college. She explained:

> I know that both of them know that I'm - you know. I have it in me. About eight doctors in my family. We have about seven engineers. So, they know that you can do it. My mom's a pharmacist. So they know that you can do it. It's all in you know how you do it. You know because they know that you can do it. But I know especially my reading teacher, she know off-hand that, even though I'm young, that she knows that you know my brain is like it's focused. So, it's just she don't want me to get discouraged when other professors don't take my work as serious as I take it. You know because some professors don't.

Participants discussed their interactions with the reading instructors during the adjustment to attending college and how problems during this adjustment affected the perception of their intelligence. Stephanie commented, “So, I believe they look at me as, you know, I'm really trying. And they do see that I am overwhelmed and it's just - it may take me a little bit longer than others.” Now that she is adjusting to college, Stephanie

added, “I have a good cordial relationship with all of my professors and…good talking relationships.”

Randy also had difficulty adjusting to college. He had problems understanding how the letter codes on his registration coordinated with the days of the week that the class met. Randy perceived that his adjustment issues in college early in the semester affected his reading instructor’s regard for his intelligence, but as he adjusted, the reading instructor developed greater respect for his intelligence. As Randy described:

> ‘Cause I mean I'm a admit I was late to, I wasn't late it's just that I got confused on when I was supposed to start college so I missed one class and he got on me to go to school and he told me how many more classes I got to miss. But other than that he probably like, ‘cause I do all my work. I like to get done my work done early – so, he probably see me as okay I can see that he's here, he wanna get his work done and stuff like that. Yeah, I got right into it.

Although the reading instructors had first-hand knowledge of the participants’ class grades in the transitional education reading classes, the participants mainly perceived that the reading instructors’ perception of their intelligence was based on academic interactions. The participants talked about their class participation and discussion about their personal background as the basis for the reading instructor’s high regard for their intelligence. Conversely, if the academic interactions with the reading instructor involved problems that the participants had in transitioning to college, then the participants perceived that the reading instructor held a low regard for their intelligence.

Students felt college staff and people in society did not know them well enough to form a perception of their intelligence. Participants described that they perceived that some college staff in departments such as advising, records and registration, and financial aid offices, as well as people in society did not consider them

intelligent. The participants stated that these people formed their perception of their intelligence based on their interactions with the participants, the participants' appearance or race. Through several strong comments, participants indicated that the college staff and people in society did not know them well enough to form an accurate assessment of their intelligence.

Quell determined that the college staff did not consider some students to be intelligent based on a conversation she overheard among the college staff. While she initially laughed when responding to the question, she became more serious and explained:

> I think a lot of times they view our intelligence is mediocre. Like, we should know, but we don't know. I've heard staff say 'Well, can you believe this student asked me and this student could have known by checking the Internet?' Yeah, I've heard staff say that.

Quell perceived that the college staff mocked the student's intelligence for not knowing how to access the information from the Internet. Jake suggested that the staff's low opinion of his intelligence was based on his appearance. Jake said that he currently works in senior citizen buildings and explained that:

> I only ran across two people that really you know talked to me like I was less than them. They looked at my attire. They didn't think I was coming from work. You know. And you know I didn't particularly care for it, but I didn't let that bother me. Some were good and some weren't because I had a bad experience with one of the advisors. And the way she make it seem like I didn't understand what's going on, but I really did, and she did end up messed up because when I went back and spoke to another advisor, they told me that she did mess up.

Like Jake, Heather also recalled an experience that she had with the advisors in which she realized that the college staff made judgments about her intelligence based on her appearance. She explained:

> I think the advisors probably think I'm nuts 'cause I wanted to take full time

> during the summer or during the fall and then when you - I guess you can't judge a book by its cover, you know I have crazy hair that's just me but I'm intelligent and I feel like when they look at your test scores they judge you like, “Is she really going to go for this? Does she really?” - and then they kinda deter you from going to a four-year college.

Esther, Fred, Larry, and Martha perceived that most college staff and people in society do not know them well enough to make a determination about their intelligence. Esther said, “I don't think they can view my intelligence ‘cause they don't know me and they never sat down and spoke with me to know.” Fred agreed, “’Cause I don't get to spend that much time with them. So, I don't see how they, I don't see how they can grade my intelligence.” Larry also commented that he had limited interaction with the college staff, so they could not have a perception of his intelligence when he said, “I don't, I haven't really talked to any of them.” Martha’s comment was along the same lines as the other participants when she said, “I don't think any of them really know me.”

Esther perceived that some people in society form their perceptions of someone’s intelligence based on that person’s race. She explained:

> I think ‘cause I'm black they probably think some black people is ignorant or whatever or don't know how to speak but that's not true not all black people are the same. Some people are ignorant because of their surroundings or I guess they, who they're raised by.

As Bill said about people in society, whether is he going to the movies or store, “They perceive me as a customer. They want my money.” Dave suggested people should get to know someone before forming an opinion:

> I feel that you know besides everybody, I feel, they feel like I'm nice, but yet they don't know me. They have a prejudiced opinion only on the first five minutes. So, to really get to know me, you'd have to actually hang out with me and talk to me instead of just meeting me for five seconds.

Participants felt that of the three groups, family and peers, faculty, college staff and people in society, that college staff and people in society knew the least about their intelligence. Thus, college staff and people in society could not form an accurate assessment of their intelligence. The participants felt that if college staff and people in

society did form a perception of their intelligence, then it was based on appearance, race, or limited interaction.

Summary. Participants expressed that their family and peers held their intelligence in high regard. They stated that their family and peers expressed their confidence in their intelligence and perceived the participants to be the high achievers in their family. Participants had similar perceptions about their reading instructors. They perceived that their reading instructors also considered them intelligent. The basis for this perception for their reading instructors, interestingly enough, was their academic interactions with the participants rather than their class grades. Study participants expressed that other people, such as the college staff and people in society formed perceptions about the participant's intelligence based on interactions without knowing them well enough to have an accurate impression. Interaction with family and peers, faculty, and people in society clearly played a role in how participants perceived other's perceptions of their own intelligence.

Sub-Research Question D: How and in What Ways do Community College Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceive Their Academic Self-Efficacy?

The sub-research question D is important because the participants' academic self-efficacy affected their perception of whether or not they believed that they have the ability to overcome academic challenges. Early in the educational journey, the participants' academic self-efficacy is evidenced by the effort that they exert in the transitional education reading class and their goal development. Ultimately, the

participants' academic self-efficacy in the long term affected their persistence in their classes and college completion.

The data analysis yielded three themes that answer this sub-research question D. One theme was the participants perceived that they would do better in college if they practiced study skills and maintained excellent attendance. The second theme describes participants' perception that their performance in the reading class would help them to do better in future college-level coursework. The third theme addresses the participants' long-term career goals that required a college degree. These three themes on the importance of study skills and attendance and that the transitional education reading class would prepare them for future college-level coursework needed to attain long-term career goals that required a college degree answer the research question about how the study participants perceived their self-efficacy.

Students perceived that they would do better in college if they practiced good study skills and attended class. Participants described the ways that they support their learning through the use of study skills. Participants talked about the importance of taking notes, reviewing the notes, and re-reading as significant strategies to support their learning more than any other study skills. While the participants did not go into details about their note-taking methods, they seemed adamant about their significance. Bill mentioned that he takes notes and reads them over, even if he is "on the bus going home." George explained how he utilizes note-taking to distinguish between levels of significance in learning. As George describes:

> I just you know I take notes and review what I learned, and then study. Just like study everything that I, been like anything that the instructor has put on the board I write it down make sure that I you know highlight it cause I consider it, it has to

> be that important if she you know putting it on the board. So, I just you know make note of what's important, what's more important than the others.

Another study skill that participants talked about was the importance of not only reading, but re-reading to support their learning. Larry said, "I feel like I have to focus on it, on the reading. I have to read everything over once like I have to read it over again." Similarly, Quell stated, "Oh, I continuously read from the book. I continuously read it and read it read for hours until I get it." Heather described a reading strategy that worked for her:

> I've learned to adapt my own ways of reading. If I don't understand something I may have to go back and re-read it 5 times or I may have to write it down in order to understand it but almost 20 something years of having reading comprehension, and not under - not being able to understand what I read but having to say it out loud or re-read it or write it helps a lot.

Participants talked about the combination of strategies that they utilize to support their learning. Participants mentioned some active reading activities that they engaged in such as highlighting and annotating. They also mentioned activities that required them to manage their time and to be organized such as utilizing a time planner and organizer. They discussed in-class activities such as asking questions, participating in class discussions, and recording the class lectures. Participants also talked about out-of-the-classroom activities that include going to the library, doing research, making flashcards, and seeking help from a tutor or friend. Rather than centering on one particular study skill, participants discussed a variety of study skills. Martha described her strategy:

> Flashcards help you. Then, you write out your flashcards, and you take them wherever you go. Like even when I take my children to the playground, while they are running around I'm studying my flashcards. If I go to work, like my job is not as like where you're running around all the time. So, I'll take my book. I'll do homework. If I need to do homework at work, I'll read over something. I'll answer questions. I'll highlight. I'm beginning to learn - taking her class, has taught me to use your book. Yes, write in it. Highlight it. I mean we have one

> person in our class who is like well I paid $130 for this book, I'm not writing in this book. But the book is so awesome. It's like you'll need this for English 101, English 102. It's an awesome book. So, it's like I highlight. I write. As soon as she says study this. And I'm like on top of her heels. Like okay. So I can know what to go back on and study. And even when I have my kids. I'm in the house. I'm sitting there going straight to the living room and I shut my door and I study. Even you know giving myself quizzes.

In addition to study skills, all of the participants maintained excellent attendance and seemed to value the importance of not missing any time from class. As Kirk explained:

> I haven't been. I always - I like listening to class a lot. I think that's my major technique in learning. I like to listen to my teacher, so I really don't play around in class. I just listen to them. If they give us the time to like not do anything, I'll probably not do anything. But, I do listen to what they say and I try not to be absent at all. Even when I was back in high school, I only would be absent if I was sick or something.

None of the participants reported missing more than three days from the transitional education reading class. If the study participants were absent from class, they stated that they maintained their class performance by letting their instructors know in advance, if possible, that they would be absent. Jake recalled when he had to miss one day from class, “One day. That was last week when it was thunderstorming. I emailed her and told her I wasn't going to do it.” These participants seemed eager to provide an explanation about their absence, which included not understanding how to read the class schedule at the beginning of the semester, a dentist appointment, a thunderstorm, limitations from public transportation, and medical emergencies such as a child’s illness. Some medical emergencies involved the students themselves. April, who was pregnant with her second girl, explained her views about lateness and attendance:

> On time. All the time. Never late. I just I think I missed twice. Once my daughter was sick and then they thought I was having a miscarriage so that was the only times. Unless it's something that I physically cannot control like

> something like that then I'm always here. I'll be here whether I'm tired, sleepy, sick, cranky [or]a hot mess, I don't care. I'm here.

Participants perceived that their academic self-efficacy was affected by the use of study skills and class attendance. While the participants talked about a variety of study skills to support their learning such as active reading strategies, tools to assist with time management and organization, and the utilization of campus resources. However, the prominent study skills that they felt were most effective were note-taking and re-reading. Also, the participants stressed the importance of class attendance and, if possible, gave advance notice to their reading instructors about their absence from class. Nearly all of the participants had excellent attendance and about half of the participants proudly reported that they had perfect attendance at the time of the interview. Participants perceived that the combination of study skills and excellent attendance supported their learning to excel in college.

Students perceived that their performance in reading class would help them do better in future college-level courses. Although the transitional education reading class was a requirement based on scoring lower than the minimal score necessary for exemption on the college placement test, all the participants stated that they perceived the class would be helpful in preparing them for future college-level coursework. Since almost all of the participants had a gap between graduation from high school and enrollment in the community college, they stated that the transitional education reading class was a needed refresher. Thus, now that they were enrolled in the required class, they focused on excelling in the class. Participants described how their reading instructors also integrated writing assignments to improve their writing skills. Therefore,

the participants attributed the reading class with the improvement of their writing skills. The academic self-efficacy of the participants was affected by the perception that the reading class provided them the capability to handle the rigors of future college-level coursework.

Initially, some of the participants were not enthusiastic about placement in the transitional education reading class, but later described the benefits of the class. As Kirk stated, “But to me, now that I'm taking the class, I'm glad I'm taking it because it's going to prepare me more for other classes.” Like Kirk, April initially did not perceive that the transitional education reading class would be helpful. However, since she was at the end of semester for the reading class when the interview was conducted, she had an opportunity to reflect on how the class benefitted her and classmates:

> They probably felt just as bad as me, like, “Man I got to take these classes. ‘Cause, at first, I thought it was just a waste, but I do see that, I mean, I really didn't know everything. And I'm probably sure that they see that they didn't understand everything neither. And that yes it was beneficial for us even though it was - feels like a waste of time. But it wasn't, I mean, I did learn a lot. And I'm sure they all - I'm sure they did too. It just took a while probably to realize to get there because our first reaction is, "Aw man really?" And who wouldn't be sad because who don't want to start in the highest level of college. ‘Cause it's like - you got - I'm like, "Man my first year was all prereqs." But I'm like, “Oh my goodness, I'm about to go into regular level classes.” That's how I feel, like I'm so hype - so excited now.

The participants considered the transitional education reading class helpful for future college-level coursework because it was a needed refresher. As Dave stated:

> Well, I feel you know this is a good start, a good refresher. So, I feel it would benefit me in the future to an effect now I have better background ‘Cause I feel like well I know it's refreshing me and since…the semesters are like back to back, I know I won't forget it and I know it'll be repeated in the college classes because this is what lower non-college classes are for to refresh you, help you get ready so I feel like it will be helpful.
> knowledge.

Peggy also discussed how the transitional education reading class provided a refresher for her:

> Cause I feel like well I know it's refreshing me and since … the semesters are like back to back, I know I won't forget it and I know it'll be repeated in the college classes because this is what lower non-college classes are for to refresh you, help you get ready so I feel like it will be helpful.

Appreciating the benefits of the transitional education reading class, participants discussed how they focused on succeeding in the class. As Larry said, it could be as simple as "Focus on what the teacher is saying as much as possible." Like Larry, Randy agreed that since the reading class was helpful, it was important to stay focused and stated, "I really focus and pay attention like I'm supposed to. It helps a lot." Heather described why she was focused on excelling in the reading class although it was just a pass or fail class. She explained:

> Now I'm set I'm focused and I'm determined to maintain a high GPA even though in my class it's pass or fail: I have a 97 [average] and I'm good with that cause I believe that if you're in a pass or fail class and you don't get a grade or you just have to get a 70 that people just go okay well if I just make a 70 I could pass the class which that sets the focus for when you go on to the other classes that 'Oh, I just need a C in order to pass this class.'

The study participants acknowledged that the transitional education reading class, when integrated with writing assignments, strengthened their writing and English skills. Thus, in addition to the improvement of reading comprehension skills, the participants also discussed how the class helped with their writing and English skills. Bill said, "The class help me better understand how to write, how to write essays how to, you know, how to do them a little easier." Esther added, "Reading class is very helpful throughout everything, especially writing."

The participants described some of the writing assignments that they completed in the transitional education reading class and how the class improved their writing. As Ike explained, “We learn different styles of writing, MLA Style. We deal with a lot of current events. We're learning how to research a lot better, how to like beginning you know writing a paper.” Ulysses also mentioned how the transitional education reading class helped him with his writing and how he impressed other people with his writing skills. He elaborated:

> It's already helping me. Today, I did a paper. I did a paper for [my] professor and I used the vocabulary that he taught us and they were like, “Well how do you” - they were asking well you know - the people who were helping me in the writing center were surprised that I was on that level.

The participants’ perception of their academic self-efficacy was affected by their belief in whether or not the transitional education reading class would prepare them for future college-level coursework. All the participants expressed that the class was helpful in preparation for future college-level coursework. Thus, participants described the importance of focus and determination to succeed in the transitional education reading class even though it was a pass/fail class and not worth any college credits. Participants described how their reading instructors integrated writing assignments along with the reading assignments. As a result, participants perceived that their performance in the transitional education reading class helped them prepare for future college-level courses like English 101 and other college-level courses that required strong writing skills. Supported by the reading and writing skills that they learned in the transitional education reading class, the participants’ perception of their academic self-efficacy was that they were prepared for future college-level coursework.

Students had goals related to their careers that require a college degree. The study participants discussed long-term goals that included career goals that require a college degree. Participants described career goals that require an associate's degree at a minimum. They also had career goals that necessitated a transfer to another college to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher. Participants were optimistic that they had the academic ability to achieve these career goals.

Several participants talked about careers in healthcare. April and Olivia both mentioned that they would like to be nurses. April said, "I want to become a nurse. So that's my intent of all this. And I don't think I'm going to let anything stop [this]. Once I'm in. I'm in. Like I'm due [have a baby] like right before school starts again." Ike indicated that he wanted, "to get a degree in radiology." Martha also expressed that her career goal was in the healthcare field, but added that it was a springboard to other career goals:

> I want to go back and get my bachelor's. You know because what I'm taking is Medical Lab Technology. But, I want to go back and get my medical technologist. And then I'll go back and eventually do something in biology because I really - towards my latter days, I want to teach college students myself. So, you know I just want to have a different variety of options when I'm not stuck doing things my whole life because I'm a very optimistic person. I'm always changing. So, I would like to have different things that I can do.

Other participants like Martha mentioned a career goal in teaching or education that required a college degree. Like Martha, Esther wants to be a teacher, but explained that her interest is in early childhood education because she "wants to be a teacher and wants to be able to own my own day care." Ulysses described his career goal of teaching in a foreign country:

> I actually studied at Global University locally, located in Beirut, Lebanon. Yeah, I studied there at a language institution. So, I have some foreign language

> background. This is [why] I choose to teach in it at least because I already have exposure to their culture. I know how to deal with their people. Yeah, I'd rather go back to the Middle East and increase my knowledge about the Arabic language and the religion of Islam.

In addition to healthcare and teaching fields, participants mentioned diverse careers including computer graphic designer, editorial journalist, game designer, lawyer, and many other career goals that require a college degree. Heather, who seemed very artsy and creative during the interview with her colorful hair, said, "I'm coming here to get my Associate's in Fine Arts and I want to transfer to the Maryland Institute College of Art where I want to take my Bachelor's in Fine Arts and then obtain my Master's in Photography." Although Randy talked about his dream to be a football player in the NFL, he discussed his other career goal:

> If I don't be a NFL player, then psychology work. I want to be a marriage counselor. I wanted to do counseling. Because I watched my parents, I watched family go in and out of marriages and I see a lot of reasons why their marriages didn't work. Saw why you know they was having problems I can help other people.

Charles also talked about going into a career in counseling based on his life experiences. Specifically, he described the foundation of his career goal to become a chemical dependency counselor:

> I was alcoholic at the age of 10 and drug addict at the age of 13. I fought those things for years. But, I understand what people are going through and it starts out - see my dad, even though I had family morals and values, you know but mainly just the value of you want it, go work for it, that's basically all my dad taught me. And my dad was very physically and verbally abusive. He wasn't a drinker, but he was ticked at life. And he took it out on me.

The participants' academic self-efficacy was affected by their selection of long-

term

career goals that require a college degree. The participants discussed career goals in the healthcare and education field as well as computer and legal fields. Some of the participants' career goals require a college degree beyond the community college level. Therefore, in order to accomplish their career goals, participants would have to transfer to a college or university where they can obtain a bachelor's degree or higher. The participants were often spoke with passion and determination about their belief in the achievement of their career goals.

Summary. Participants based their academic self-efficacy on study skills and attendance, the belief that the transitional education reading class would prepare them for future college-level coursework, and the development of career goals that require a college degree. First, participants asserted that they would perform better in their transitional education reading classes and college if they practiced study skills and maintained excellent attendance. For the study skills, rather than focus on one study skill, they talked about diverse study skills such as active reading strategies, time management, organization, as well as in-classroom and out-of-classroom activities. The participants indicated that the efforts and focus that they exercised with study skills and attendance would affect their capacity to succeed in college. Additionally, the participants expressed that they benefitted from the skills they obtained in the transitional education reading classes. Although the reading class was not an elective course and not related to their college major, the participants felt the class was helpful. They also attributed to the reading class not only their improved reading comprehension skills, but also their improved writing and English skills. The participants indicated that the academic foundation they established in the reading class would enable them to succeed

in their future college-level coursework. Next, participants discussed career goals that require a college degree and some that necessitated a college degree beyond the community college. Some of the participants intended to transfer to four-year colleges to achieve their career goals. Participants seemed optimistic that they would be able to achieve their career goals that require a college degree.

Summary

This chapter represented the results and findings from 20 personal interviews with study participants and analysis of the college catalog, student newspaper, and college placement test booklet. An data analysis of research question one resulted in gaining an understanding of how community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey. The educational journey began with life-changing events that galvanized the participants to enroll in the community college. After enrollment, the gap between enrollment in their previous educational institution and enrollment in the community college often resulted in additional challenges such as placement in the transitional education reading class and transition to college challenges. The participants faced these challenges with optimism and a support network.

In the analysis of sub-research question A, participants' perception of their intelligence was not a reflection of their test results on a college placement test for reading. Participants did not want other people to form a perception of their intelligence based on their enrollment in a transitional education reading class. Although participants were motivated to start the educational journey, many were not academically prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework, which was manifested by their lack of reading comprehension skills. Next, the analysis of sub-research question B on participants'

perception on other students' intelligence in two categories focused on students enrolled in the transitional education reading class, their classmates, and students who were exempt from taking the class. Many participants considered classmates enrolled in their transitional education reading class as intelligent. The basis for the participants' perception was the classmates' academic effort put forth in class. Some participants noted that classmates who did not excel in class could improve their academic performance by exerting more effort in their studies and improving their class behavior. For students who were exempt from the transitional education reading class, participants considered these students' intelligence the result of good parenting, inherent intelligence, or both. However, the majority of the participants attributed the intelligence of these students to their effort and their enrollment in college immediately after high school, thus eliminating the gap.

It was evident in the analysis of sub-research question C that interaction played a significant role in participants' perception of how others perceive their own intelligence. Based on the personal interactions, participants indicated that family members and peers considered them to be intelligent and high achievers. Although reading instructors had insight into participants' academic performance and class grades, participants believed that their reading instructors based their perceptions of the participants' intelligence on academic interactions. Due to limited interaction with college staff and people in society, participants indicated that these people could not form accurate assessments of their own intelligence. Finally, in the analysis of sub-research question D, participants asserted that if they maintained excellent attendance, and applied the study skills learned in the

transitional education reading class, they would excel in college and realize their career goals that require a college degree.

The final chapter will focus on interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations based on the data collected. A summary of the themes will be provided. There will also be a synthesis of the themes that will result in five important findings. Based on these findings, the researcher will provide recommendations for actions and recommendations for future research on the topic.

Chapter V:

Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In the preceding chapters, the introduction presented information about the problems of practice, research problems, purpose of the research, significance of the study, and theoretical framework. Additionally, included was a thorough review of the literature as related to the research study, as well as the context and challenges in transitional education. Next, the methodology, which provided in-depth details on the sampling plan, was outlined. Then, the findings from the 20 interviews with the study participants were presented. This chapter revisits the problems of practice and connects the findings from the research study to the theoretical framework and previous research. As a result of the research study, five important findings emerged. This last chapter details the interpretations and conclusions from the findings and provides recommendations for practitioners as well as suggestions for future research in transitional education reading classes in the community college.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college in the greater suburban area of a southeastern state in the United States. Specifically, the study explored how the students perceived their intelligence and the intelligence of other students, how they perceived others' perceptions of their intelligence, and how they perceived their academic self-efficacy. The research study answered the following research question: How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey? It also answered the following subset of research questions that were important to address to understand the main research question as it related to students' educational journey: (a) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their intelligence? (b) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive the intelligence of other students? (c) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive others' perceptions of their own intelligence (the college staff, faculty, peers, family, society)? (d) How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their academic self-efficacy?

Statement of Significance

Transitional education is an integral component in higher education. According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics about 2011-2012 undergraduates, approximately 25% of the students at public four-year institutions and

approximately 41% at public two-year institutions self-reported having taken a transitional education course (NCES, 2012). With regard to the three areas for transitional education courses—math, reading, and writing—when reading comprehension skills are the core of the problem for learning college-level coursework, the probability of college completion is very low (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). A thorough inquiry of students enrolled in transitional education reading classes was needed to add to the topic and literature in higher education.

The study advanced the field of transitional education in several significant ways. First, it explored some of the elements of the educational journey based upon 20 interviews with study participants enrolled in transitional education reading classes in the community college. Participants were enrolled in transitional education courses as a result of a cut-off score on a college placement test that gauged their reading comprehension skills. Thus, their educational journey took a different direction than that of students who did not need to enroll in courses based on the placement test cut-off score. Second, the study provides a better understanding of the study participants' perceptions of their own intelligence, the intelligence of others, and academic self-efficacy. These perceptions can be influential in understanding students' educational journey as they make meaning of their world. Third, the exploratory study adds to the basic literature needed in the field of transitional education regarding college completion. The insights gained from the analysis of the data collected are significant in understanding the students and informing practitioners who have an interest in transitional education reading courses.

Revisiting Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this study were Dweck's (2000) self-theories of intelligence, Bandura's (1977, 1982) foundation of self-efficacy, and Gee's (2000) theory on identity. The findings support Dweck's self-theories of intelligence: that some people perceive intelligence as incremental and able to be enhanced with academic effort (Dweck, 2000). Almost all of the participants described their intelligence, as well as other students' intelligence, as malleable or changeable with academic effort. Only a few study participants, however, ascribed to Dweck's other theory of intelligence: that some people perceive intelligence as fixed and not able to be changed (Dweck, 2000). The few participants that held this mindset attributed this perception not to themselves or their classmates, but to other students who were exempt from enrollment in the transitional education reading classes.

The participants' perception that intelligence could be enhanced through academic effort supports Bandura's (1977) foundation of self-efficacy: belief in one's capabilities to influence an outcome. All of the participants stated that a transitional education reading course was helpful in preparation for future college-level courses, thus strengthening their self-efficacy. Although the participants had some level of academic self-efficacy, they were vulnerable to completion of college as a result of difficulty in goal development, lack of preparation for college, lack of reading comprehension skills, and gap before enrollment in college.

Additionally, there was support for Gee's (2000) theory of identity, in particular the affinity identity. The participants exhibited an affinity identity because they shared

some of the same endeavors and traits of their classmates in the transitional education reading class. Whether their classmates were excelling or not, they held a connection as a group because of the common need to strengthen their reading comprehension skills and common endeavors to pass the class. The participants' perceptions of intelligence, academic self-efficacy, and identity played a significant role in their college completion.

Summary of Themes

The study resulted in 16 themes that answered the central research question and the four subset research questions. The theoretical framework focused on the participants' perceptions of intelligence and self-efficacy. The study participants, who were enrolled in transitional education reading classes in the community college, provided responses to answer the research questions and form the themes that emerged.

The central research question asked how and in what ways the community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses described their educational journey. Four themes answered this question. The first theme determined that participants perceived that the gap before enrollment in college contributed to their transitional challenges. With regard to the second theme, participants acknowledged that life-changing events affected their decision to enroll in college. The third theme indicates that participants believed family (especially their children), faith, and belief in themselves played a significant role in their support network. With regard to the fourth theme, participants acknowledged that they had been placed in other transitional education classes.

Participants' educational journey began after life-changing events that usually centered around problems in the economy, employment outside the college, or the desire

to take advantage of military benefits. Many of the participants did not enroll in college immediately after completing high school. Thus, the time between their enrollments in educational institutions formed a gap during which they were focused on other aspects of life rather than formal learning, thereby creating some challenges. One significant challenge created by the gap, as perceived by the participants, was their not meeting the cut-off score on the college placement test for reading. As a result, the participants were placed in transitional education reading classes. In addition to being placed in transitional education reading, all the participants also had been placed in other transitional education classes for math, English, or both. Therefore, the participants embarked on their educational journey with enrollment in at least two transitional education courses or, for many participants, three transitional education courses. To aid in their educational journey, participants relied on their support network, which consisted of their family, especially their children, religious faith, or in some cases, only themselves.

The first research subquestion asked how and in what ways the community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceived their intelligence. Three themes answered this question. One theme indicated that participants perceived that results on the reading placement test were not a reflection of their intelligence. With regard to the second theme, participants acknowledged that they were not prepared for college. The third theme revealed that lack of prior reading comprehension skills negatively affected participants' perceptions of their intelligence.

The participants' perceptions of their intelligence were affected by their college placement test scores, preparation for college, and reading comprehension skills.

Although they did not meet the minimal score to be exempt from placement in the transitional education reading course, the participants perceived that the test by itself was not a reflection of their intelligence. The participants believed their intelligence was higher than that reflected by results on a college placement test and that there were other factors at play that could have affected their test scores. Thus, some of the participants had a negative reaction to placement in the transitional education reading class and, consequently, did not discuss their placement in the reading class with family or friends. Although some of the participants had a negative reaction to placement in the transitional education reading class, they acknowledged that they lacked prior reading comprehension skills before taking the placement test. The lack of prior reading comprehension skills negatively affected the students' perceptions of their intelligence. Although the lack of reading comprehension skills was reinforced on the college placement test, participants did not believe that the totality of their intelligence was based on a college placement test. Yet, the combination of their lack of reading comprehension skills and their failure to meet the minimal score on the college placement test for reading added to participants' perceptions that they were not academically prepared for college. Nevertheless, they were optimistic that, with sufficient academic effort, they would become academically prepared and able to handle the rigorous college-level coursework.

The second research subquestion asked how and in what ways community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceived the intelligence of other students. Three themes answered the research question. The first theme stated that participants negatively perceived the intelligence of their classmates based on classmates' effort. The second theme indicated that participants perceived that other students exempt

from the reading course benefited from good parenting and inherent intelligence. With regard to the third theme, participants perceived that other students not required to enroll in the transitional education reading course put forth more effort than students who were placed in the course.

Although all the participants were placed in the transitional education class because they did not meet the minimal score to be exempt from the class, participants perceived that most of their classmates had a high level of intelligence. They formed this perception based on classmates' participation in class, group activities, and graduation from academic high schools. With regard to classmates not performing at a high academic level in class, the participants perceived that these classmates did not put forth the effort to excel. Study participants perceived that the classmates' lack of effort was demonstrated in their classroom behavior. According to the participants, this lack of effort was attributed to the classmates' ages and maturity levels, as well as the fact that the transitional education reading class was not worth college credits. Some participants perceived that other students, who were not their classmates and were exempt from the reading course, had parents that instilled the importance of education or had inherent intelligence. Some of the participants perceived that the other students' efforts to excel academically were initiated in secondary school, allowing them to be exempt from reading on the college placement test and to continue to excel in college. Some participants also thought it was advantageous to attend college immediately after graduation from high school, because there would be no significant gap between high school and enrollment in college.

The third research subquestion asked how and in what ways community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceived others' (the college staff, faculty, peers, family, society) perceptions of their own intelligence. Three themes answered the research question. The first theme stated that participants perceived that their family and peers held the participants' intelligence in high regard. The second theme suggested that interactions with faculty led participants to believe that the interactions were the basis for how faculty perceived their intelligence. The third theme indicated that participants believed college staff and people in society did not know them well enough to form a perception of their intelligence.

Interaction with family and peers, faculty, college staff, and people in society played a vital role in how the participants perceived that others viewed their intelligence. Participants perceived that the people with whom they had the most interaction, family and peers, held their intelligence in high regard because they were considered to be high achievers. Some of the participants were the first in their families to attend college or even to graduate from high school. Participants' interactions with faculty, rather than class grades, played a role in how the participants perceived the faculty's view of their intelligence. If a participant had positive interactions with faculty, he or she perceived that the faculty thought his or her intelligence was high. If a participant had negative interactions with faculty, he or she perceived that the faculty believed his or her intelligence was low. Most of the participants believed that the people with whom they had the fewest interactions, college staff and people in society, did not know them well enough to form an accurate perception of their intelligence. Therefore, some college staff

and people in society formed an erroneous perception of their intelligence based on their attire or race.

The fourth research subquestion asked how and in what ways community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceived their academic self-efficacy. The research question was answered by three themes. Theme one stated that participants perceived that they would perform better in college if they practiced good study skills and attended class. The second theme suggested that participants perceived that their performance in reading class would help them perform better in future college-level courses. The third theme indicated that participants had career goals that required a college degree.

Participants' academic self-efficacy to excel in college centered on practicing good study skills and having excellent attendance. Participants perceived that a variety of study skills rather than a focus on one study skill afforded them the greatest opportunity to excel in college. The primary study skills considered important by the participants were note-taking and active reading strategies. In addition to study skills, the participants perceived that attendance was mandatory for success in college. Although the transitional education reading class was required for almost all of the participants and most were not enthusiastic about taking the course, the participants believed the reading class would help prepare them for meeting the demands of college-level coursework. Thus, they focused on excelling in the reading class and gleaning the reading comprehension skills, which sometimes incorporated improved writing skills, to transfer the skills to future college-level coursework. Participants' academic self-efficacy was demonstrated in setting career goals that required a college degree. Furthermore, some

participants set career goals that required an advanced degree above the level of an associate degree from a community college, which necessitated a transfer to a four-year college or university.

Findings

The research revealed 16 themes that answered one central research question and four research subquestions examined in the study. Based on a thorough review of the 16 themes, the researcher identified five major findings based on the theoretical framework and research questions. The five major findings were developed in the context of the literature and relevance to this study on the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. Finding one indicated that the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses was shaped by the recognition of deficiencies in academic performance, but participants remained committed to academic improvement. Finding two indicated that the participants based their perceptions of other students' intelligence on parenting, inherent intelligence, academic effort, and no gap before enrollment in college. Finding three revealed that participants' academic self-efficacy was based on long-terms career goals requiring a college degree, but participants had difficulty in goal development. Finding four suggested that participants perceived that others (faculty and college staff) assessed their own intelligence based on interactions with them. The final finding noted that participants perceived academic advising as not helpful in navigating the college process for students placed in multiple transitional education courses. These five study findings lay the groundwork as well as galvanization for discussion on transitional education reading courses and college completion in the community college.

Finding One: The Educational Journey of Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses was Shaped by the Recognition of Deficiencies in Academic Performance, but Remained Committed to Academic Improvement

There were several factors that influenced the participants' perceptions of their intelligence. These factors affected whether or not the participants had high or low regard for their intelligence. The influences on their perceptions of intelligence were reading comprehension skills, college preparation, academic effort, and the gap between their enrollments in educational institutions. Collectively, these influences played a significant role in the participants' perceptions of their intelligence, which could affect their college completion.

First, because all of the participants were enrolled in a transitional education reading class, they were faced early in their educational journey with the fact that they lacked the level of reading comprehension skills needed to be exempt from the class. Some participants took the reading college placement test for a second time; however, they were still unable to meet the cut-off score required to be exempt from the transitional education reading class. They were not enthused about their enrollment in the class because it was an open proclamation to others that they lacked reading comprehension skills as an adult learner. Therefore, some participants were adamant that the college placement test and transitional education reading class were not a reflection of their overall intelligence. Additionally, the participants did not want others to perceive their intelligence as a reflection of their reading comprehension skills.

When asked about their own perceptions of their reading comprehension skills before enrollment in college, many participants admitted that they needed improvement

in this area. Many participants commented that reading was their worst subject or that they did not like reading unless it involved a topic that they found interesting. Also, the participants stated that they had difficulty reading at the college level and were confused when it came to reading comprehension. Because they realized that they lacked reading comprehension skills and the college placement test reinforced their beliefs about their lack of reading comprehension skills, the participants were resigned to the notion that enrollment in the transitional education reading class was a necessary refresher. Nevertheless, because they were enrolled in the class, many of the participants put forth the academic effort and excelled in the reading class. They appeared to be proud to disclose their excellent class averages and to explain how the class benefited them. Although some participants commented on their excellent class performance, they still lacked confidence in their intelligence. The lack of reading comprehension skills had a negative effect on their perceptions of their own intelligence. When queried about perceptions of their intelligence, some participants had low regard for their intelligence. The participants' lack of reading comprehension skills was one of the bases for this perception of their intelligence.

Next, the lack of college preparation had a negative influence on the participants' perception of their intelligence. The participants embarked on their educational journey after life-changing events galvanized their decision to enroll in college. Many of the participants expressed the notion that they were emotionally and mentally prepared for college. Indeed, participants believed they had the tools, such as time management, and the maturity needed to excel in college. Nevertheless, some participants acknowledged that although they were emotionally prepared, they were not academically prepared to

tackle the demands of college-level coursework. This realization could have been the outcome of their being placed in multiple transitional education courses. The participants' lack of college preparation had a negative effect on the perception of their intelligence.

The participants provided several explanations for their lack of preparation for college. They commented on the lack of college preparation that they received at their high schools, the gap between high school and college enrollment, and a lack of prior knowledge about the preparation needed for college. Because some of the participants were the first in their families to graduate from high school or attend college, they perceived that they were unaware of the preparation needed to tackle college-level coursework. For various reasons, the participants were not prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework.

The lack of preparation for college-level coursework had a negative influence on the participants' perceptions of their intelligence. Although they lacked reading comprehension skills and preparation for college-level coursework, all of the participants commented that the transitional education reading class would prepare them to meet the demands of college-level coursework. Thus, they put forth the academic effort to excel in the transitional education reading class because of the perceived benefits of the course in preparation for college-level coursework. The participants' perception that the transitional education reading course was beneficial to their academic performance is aligned to a different study that was conducted at a higher education institution in the southern region of the United States. Based on the results of the survey administered to 133 students enrolled in transitional education courses, 97.1% of the participants

indicated that the transitional education courses enhanced their academic performance to some extent or greater (Green, 2011). In this study, the participants' mindset regarding their intelligence was "energized by the idea that they [could] have an impact on their mind" (Dweck, 2000, p. 10). The participants focused on acquiring the reading comprehension skills needed to prepare them for college-level coursework.

Third, the participants based perceptions of their intelligence on the gap between enrollments in educational institutions. Almost all of the participants had a gap between their last enrollment in an educational institution and enrollment in the community college. Studies indicate that the majority of transitional education students are 20 years old or older, returnees, or delayed entrants to college (Attewell et al., 2006; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). For the participants, the gaps ranged from almost a year to 40 years. The average gap for the participants was 10 years. Many of the participants had not been in a formal educational institution since they graduated from high school. Many participants stated that during the gap they were working, enrolled in the military, or raising their children. The gap between enrollments in educational institutions had a negative influence on the participants' perceptions of their intelligence.

As a result of the gap, the participants believed they were faced with additional challenges in their educational journey. One challenge they perceived to result from the gap was a low score on the college placement test. They believed that they had forgotten the knowledge that they learned in high school and, therefore, needed to refresh their memory. Thus, their test scores resulted in placement in the transitional education reading class. Another challenge noted during the gap was the fact that many of the participants had children and full-time employment outside college; consequently, they

had more responsibilities than students who enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation. Some participants had difficulty with the time management and organization needed to incorporate the coursework load into their already busy lives. An additional challenge related to the gap was the transition to college. Participants commented on their frustration with the lack of guidance from the college staff and the lack of maturity of some of their classmates.

Collectively, these challenges resulted from the gap in enrollment between educational institutions. The enrollment gap was a negative influence on the participants' perceptions of their intelligence. They believed the gap created challenges that affected their intelligence. These challenges led to obstacles in their educational journey. Nevertheless, participants were optimistic that they could face the challenges and attain their educational goals.

Lastly, the participants' perceptions of their intelligence were influenced by their academic efforts. One of the theoretical frameworks for this study was Dweck's (2000) self-theories on intelligence (2000). The first self-theory was the theory of fixed intelligence or "entity-theory"; that is, some people believe that intelligence is an entity that lies within one and for which there is no change (Dweck, 2000, p. 2). The other self-theory was the "incremental theory," in which intelligence is portrayed as something that is malleable or changeable, that can be increased through one's efforts (Dweck, 2000, p. 3).

The participants perceived that their intelligence could be increased through their academic efforts. With regard to Dweck's two self-theories of intelligence, entity theory and the incremental theory, the participants held to the incremental theory of intelligence.

There was no evidence that the participants perceived their intelligence to be fixed without the possibility of change, as noted in the entity theory. Several factors supported the participants' perceptions that they did not reflect the entity theory of intelligence. First, when asked about the perception of their intelligence, the participants did not describe their intelligence as based on inherent intelligence, their genes, or something that was fixed. Second, the participants acknowledged their lack of reading comprehension skills and the need for the class to help them improve. Third, the participants, once enrolled in the transitional education reading class, focused on learning goals rather than performance goals to excel in the class. Also, according to Dweck, failure can make entity-theory students feel vulnerable and cause them to exhibit symptoms of depression (2000). Although the participants experienced failure on the college placement test, lacked reading comprehension skills, were underprepared for college, and faced challenges from their enrollment gap, they were optimistic and motivated. They perceived that their academic efforts in the transitional education reading class would be beneficial and prepare them for college-level coursework.

The participants recognized their academic deficiencies in reading comprehension skills, lack of college preparedness, and the challenges of the gap before enrollment in college. Yet, they were committed to academic improvement. They held, as described by Dweck (2000), an incremental or growth mindset with regard to their intelligence. The participants' perceptions of their intelligence affected their efforts. The participants believed that, through academic effort, their intelligence was a malleable quality that could be enhanced with the skills learned in the transitional education reading class. The researcher, Bahr (2010) concluded that transitional education courses are effective even

for students who have "greatest academic deficiencies as well as those who face multiple deficiencies" (p. 201).

Finding Two: Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses Perceived that Other Students' Academic Performance was Based on Internal Forces such as Academic Effort and External Forces such as Parenting, Inherent Intelligence, and No Gap Before Enrollment in College

Aside from their perceptions of their own intelligence, participants reflected on other students' intelligence. They held perceptions of the intelligence for two groups of students: (a) their classmates and (b) students who were exempt from placement in transitional education reading classes. The influences on their perceptions of other students' intelligence were based on external and internal forces. The internal forces were actions that participants perceived were controllable such as academic effort. The external forces were actions that participants perceived as outside of control such as parenting, inherent intelligence, and no gap before enrollment in college. The strongest influence on the participants' perceptions of both groups of students' intelligence was the internal force of academic effort. They attributed the intelligence of students who were exempt from the transitional education reading classes primarily to external forces such as parenting, inherent intelligence, and no gap before enrollment.

The participants' perception of the influence of these types of external and internal forces is aligned to Bean and Metzner's influence of variables on attrition such as background and defining variables, academic variables, environmental variables, and social integration variables (1985). The participants' perception is aligned to Bean and Metzner's conclusion that for nontraditional commuter students such as students at a

community college, of all the variables, social integration had minimal effect on students' academic performance and attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The participants did not perceive social integration as a strong influence on other students' academic performance.

Because the participants had regular contact with their classmates, they based their perceptions of their classmates' intelligence on whether or not the classmates exhibited academic effort which was an internal force. Most of the participants held, as described by Dweck, an incremental or growth mindset regarding intelligence, believing that intelligence could be enhanced through learning and effort; this mindset was the opposite of that of the entity theorist, who views intelligence as fixed (Dweck, 2000). As Dweck noted, different theories of intelligence affect the way people see and react to others' successes and failures. For the entity theorists, others' failure is a reflection of intelligence. On the other hand, for incremental theorists, others' failure elicits thoughts about effort or strategy and the kinds of instruction that would help students overcome their difficulty (Dweck, 2000). The participants' perception that intelligence is enhanced by academic effort is aligned with Dweck's description of the incremental theory.

As incremental theorists, the participants did not perceive classmates as rivals; they perceived their classmates as a part of the affinity group. In an affinity group, allegiance is first to the common endeavors or practices, then to the other people in terms of shared culture or traits (Gee, 2000). In this affinity group, the participants' identity was tied to common endeavors or practices of learning reading comprehension skills. Although the participants primarily focused on their performance attainment in the transitional education reading class, they also perceived their classmates' performance

attainment as a reflection of "collective efficacy" (Pajares, 1996, p. 569). The collective efficacy was based on the participants' shared belief that, as a group, they had the capability to reach a certain level of attainment. Because they were not rivals, the participants promoted academic effort as a vehicle that, if utilized by their classmates, could enhance the classmates' learning and intelligence.

The entity theorists view their peers as rivals; therefore, others' misfortunes bolster their self-esteem (Dweck, 2000). The study participants, as incremental theorists, derived self-esteem from their own efforts to succeed; therefore, there was no rivalry with others (Dweck, 2000). The participants had high regard for some of their classmates' intelligence based on class participation and group activities that were based on academic effort. Similarly, the participants had low regard for some of their classmates' intelligence based on lack of academic effort, which they mainly attributed to the classmates' age or maturity level. The common thread for the participants' perceptions of classmates' intelligence was related to academic effort.

Although the participants' perceptions of their classmates' intelligence was based mainly on academic effort, their perceptions of students who were exempt from the transitional education reading classes were based on external forces such as parenting, inherent intelligence, and no gap before enrollment in college, in addition to academic effort. Because these students were not enrolled in the transitional education reading class with the participants, they did not consider these students' success as collective efficacy; however, they did consider the key influence on their perceptions of these students' intelligence to be academic effort. The participants perceived that the students put forth academic effort before their enrollment in college; therefore, they were able to

score high enough on the college placement test to be exempt from the transitional education reading class. The participants also perceived that the students' ongoing academic success was based on their academic efforts.

Additionally, the participants based these students' intelligence on the parenting that the students received. They perceived that these students benefitted from good parenting through which the parents pushed them to excel in learning. They also perceived that these students were able to excel in college because they enrolled in college immediately after graduation from high school, thus eliminating the gap between enrollments in educational institutions. They believed the knowledge these students gained in high school was still fresh when they enrolled in college; thus, the transitional education reading course was not necessary. A few participants were, as described by Dweck (2000), entity theorists in their perception of these students' intelligence. The participants who were entity theorists perceived that these students were born smart, intelligence was in their genes, they were gifted, or they were blessed. In other words, their intelligence was inherent, not based on academic effort.

Overall, participants reflected on other students' intelligence for two groups of students: (a) students who were their classmates in the transitional education reading class and (b) students who were exempt from placement in the transitional education reading class. Many of the participants perceived that their classmates' intelligence was based on internal forces such as academic effort and that the lack of academic effort reflected poorly on the class as a group. Many of the participants perceived that the intelligence of other students, who were exempt from the transitional education reading class, also was based on academic effort, as well as external forces such as good

parenting and no gap before enrollment in college. Only a few participants perceived that these students' excellence in college was not based as much on academic effort but on the external force of inherent intelligence.

Finding Three: Goal Development to Support Long-term Career Aspirations was Lacking Among Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses

Although the participants exhibited academic self-efficacy as they set career goals requiring a college degree, they had difficulty with the goal development needed to attain the career goal. Bandura stated that efficacy "involves a generative capability in which component cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). The participants seemed clear in their perceptions that excellent class attendance, study skills, reading comprehension skills, and goals were necessary to persist and complete college. Nevertheless, for some participants there was a disconnection regarding how to develop the short-term goals needed to attain their long-term career goals. According to the social learning theory, processes of goal setting and self-evaluative reactions can cultivate motivation (Bandura, 1977). Although nearly all participants set long-term career goals requiring a college degree, many had difficulty setting short-term goals that could cultivate the motivation to attain the long-term goals. This difficulty in goal development, made the participants 'vulnerable' in terms of college completion.

According to Bandura (1982), self-efficacy is based on four principal sources of information: performance attainment, vicarious experience of observing the performance of others, verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences, and physiological states. Attaining goals is a major component for all four principal sources of information,

especially performance attainment. Participants' gaining mastery experiences through the attainment of their short-term goals could positively influence their attainment of long-term career goals requiring a college degree.

Nevertheless, participants had a disconnection regarding the process for the development of short-term goals. Participants indicated two major areas of difficulty in goal development: (a) distinction between long-term and short-term goals and (b) development of short-term goals directly related to long-term goals. First, some participants experienced difficulty in the distinction between short-term and long-term career goals. Bandura (1982) described the short-term goals as subgoals. Bandura referred to the subgoals as "proximal" goals, which can motivate students to achieve the larger or "distal" goals in the future. Most of the participants stated proximal goals that were actually their distal goals. For example, some of the participants noted that their short-term (proximal) goals were to attain a college degree or graduate from college, which were the same as their long-term (distal) goals. In other words, their short-term goal of attaining a college degree involved mastery of difficult and demanding learning tasks over years of time and equated to the long-term goal. Thus, some participants had difficulty with the distinction between setting short-term goals and long-term goals. Without the ability to set proximal goals that provide, as Bandura noted, "incentives and guides for action, distal goals are too far removed in time to effectively mobilize effort or to direct what one does in the here and now" (Bandura, 1982, p. 134).

Next, some of the participants had difficulty in the development of specific short-term goals related to their long-term career goals. Some participants' short-term goals included getting focused, doing a good job in college, being more patient, and listening

more. As these short-term goals were not specific, they would be difficult to measure; therefore, opportunity for performance attainment and mastery experience would be limited. Without the mastery experiences of specific, measurable short-term goals, a low sense of academic self-efficacy could weaken students' motivation to persist in college. As Zimmerman (2000) noted, self-efficacious students undertake difficult and challenging tasks. In contrast, participants with a low sense of academic self-efficacy resulting from the lack of performance attainment for their short-term goals could abandon the difficult and challenging tasks required to reach their long-term career goals.

The participants reflected self-efficacy that was manifested in their long-term career goals, in that almost all of the career goals required a college degree. They established long-term goals that necessitated the completion of difficult and demanding tasks involving years of learning. Indeed, several of the participants set career goals that required a degree beyond the two-year community college and required a transfer to a four-year college or university.

Although the participants displayed the self-efficacy to set career goals that required a college degree, they faced difficulty in their goal development. Their goal development was crippled by short-term goals that equated to long-term goals and short-term goals that were void of specificity and measurability. The absence of mastery experiences or performance attainment of short-term goals that were directly aligned to the long-term career goals could develop into feelings of futility and despondency. These feelings of futility and despondency could result in self-inefficacy because of anxiety about the inability to influence events and social conditions (Bandura, 1982). The participants had the self-efficacy to enroll in college, overcome family and personal

issues, academic advisement issues, and transition to college, their sense of self-efficacy has to be cultivated to a higher level to persist in college and attain long-term career goals requiring a college degree.

The participants are 'vulnerable' to the same outcomes as students who were part of a longitudinal study conducted by researchers at the National Bureau of Economic Research on the effects of transitional education courses (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012). Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez analyzed the data for 100,000 first-time, full-time degree seeking students enrolled in six community colleges in a large, urban community college system between Fall 2001 and Fall 2007. Out of the 90% of all the students who tested into a transitional education course, after three years of tracking, 64% of the students had dropped out (not enrolled, no degree), 24% were still enrolled, and only 12% had completed a degree or transferred to a local public four-year institution (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012).

Finding Four: Interactions with Various Subgroups, including College Staff/Faculty and Extended Family, Affected the Educational Journey of Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses

With regard to how the participants perceived that subgroups (faculty, college staff, and extended family) viewed their own intelligence, their perceptions were based mainly on interactions they had with those people. Although the faculty had firsthand knowledge of the participants' grades on quizzes, tests, and other class assessments, the participants perceived that the faculty based perceptions of their intelligence on academic interactions. On the other hand, because the college staff in records and registration, financial aid, and academic advising had limited interactions with participants, the

participants perceived that these people did not know them well enough to form an accurate assessment of their intelligence. If the college staff did have a perception of the participants' intelligence, it was based mainly on the participants' appearance. Since enrollment in college is often seen by society as a reflection of a high level of intelligence and many of the participants were the first ones in their family to attend college, in the interactions with extended family, they were considered the high achievers. However, placement in a transitional education reading course was not viewed as a course for high achievers, so participants were caught with conflicting views of their intelligence.

Interaction, whether academic, personal, or both, was a key determinant in how the participants perceived that faculty and college staff viewed their own intelligence. Participants based their perceptions of how the faculty viewed their own intelligence on interactions rather than academic grades or assessments. It was evident that participants were aware that the faculty had access to their grades, but they perceived that the faculty formed their perception on the basis of interactions. The positive interactions that influenced this perception resulted when the participants participated in class discussion on various topics, answered the faculty's questions during class, discussed their occupations and other worldly experiences, shared their families' academic and professional backgrounds, and took part in other interactions. The participants perceived that the faculty were impressed with their real-life experiences and the academic effort they demonstrated during class. Therefore, the participants based their perception of the faculty's high regard of their intelligence on these positive interactions.

The important of faculty interaction was aligned to the results of a study that measured the positive and negative influences on reading confidence of students enrolled

in transitional reading courses and compared to students enrolled in English 101 (Cantrell et al., 2013). The researchers found that "In terms of social interactions, students in developmental reading in developmental reading courses were more likely than students in English 101 to identify teachers as having the most positive influence on their reading confidence" (Cantrell et al., 2013, p. 22). Nevertheless, a few participants had interactions with faculty that they perceived as negative. These interactions were related mainly to the transitional challenges they encountered in college, such as how to read the registration form to show up on the correct days for class. Based on these negative interactions, they perceived that faculty had low regard for their intelligence.

The participants' identity as college students in the reading class in the community college was one of the roles they played in society. Their identity as college students was connected to their intelligence and perceptions of their intelligence during academic interaction or discourse dialogue with the faculty. This part of the participants' identity was aligned with Gee's discourse-identity (process), which is an individual trait recognized in the discourse dialogue (power) of or with "rational" individuals (source of power) (Gee, 2000, p. 103). In other words, the participants perceived that their intelligence (individual trait) was based on academic interactions around discourse dialogue (power) and that the rational individuals were the faculty (source of power). The participants' identity, which included their perceptions of their intelligence, was based on the interactions or the discourse dialogue with the faculty.

The participants perceived that the college staff in records and registration, financial aid, or academic advising did not know them well enough to form a perception of their intelligence. Indeed, several participants were adamant about this perception.

Additionally, although the participants perceived that faculty held a source of power to form a perception of the participants' intelligence, many participants did not perceive a source of power from the college staff.

Therefore, the participants perceived that if the college staff did form an opinion of their intelligence it was based upon their appearance or communication skills. The perception was based on the interactions in which the college staff observed the participant's appearance, such as the color of the participant's hair, his or her attire, or communication skills. Also, the participants believed the staff's perceptions of their intelligence were based on how the participants communicated through their vocabulary. The participants perceived that the college staff did not know them well enough to have an accurate assessment of their intelligence; therefore, perceptions were based on appearance and communication skills.

To the extended family, many of the participants were considered the high achievers because they were enrolled in college and had long-term career goals that required a college degree. Thus, many of the interactions with the extended family were ones of support and encouragement because college completion could translate to a better life for not only the participants, but their families and children. However, during their enrollment process which resulted in placement in a transitional education reading course as a result of not meeting the cutoff score on the college assessment test, the college assigned them to a class that was not considered for high achievers. This institution identity, by its laws, rules, traditions or principles, can identify a person as a student enrolled in transitional education reading courses (Gee, 2000) Thus, there was a "role conflict" from the extended family and college's view of their intelligence.

Whether the participants perceived that subgroups (faculty, college staff, and extended family) viewed their intelligence with high or low regard was based on interactions with them. If the interactions were positive, they perceived that the faculty and college staff had high regard for their intelligence. If their interactions were considered negative, the participants perceived that the faculty had low regard for their intelligence. Although participants' identity was connected to their performance as college students, perceptions of their intelligence were influenced by the discourse dialogue with the faculty, rather than class grades. Based on the frequency and types of interactions, as well as the role of the faculty, the participants considered the faculty to be a source of power. Because the participants had limited interactions with the college staff, they believed the college staff did not know them well enough to form an accurate perception of their intelligence. Thus, the participants did not consider the college staff to be a source of power. The interactions with extended family led participants to perceive that they were considered the high achievers because of their enrollment in college. However, the college's placement in the transitional education reading class created a role conflict because the class was not considered a class for high achievers. In addition to the transitional education reading class, all the participants were enrolled in at least one other transitional education class such transitional education writing and/or math.

Finding Five: Deficiencies in Academic Advising Practices Negatively Affected the Educational Journey of Transitional Education Reading Students as They Navigated Enrollment in Transitional Education Reading Courses

All of the participants in the community college were enrolled in more than transitional education class. Enrollment in just one transitional education course, reading,

places the participants in a dismal college completion statistic. Only 25% of the 60% of community college students who enroll in at least one transitional education course earn a degree within eight years (Gonzalez, 2010). Appallingly, this statistic is based on eight years for a student enrolled in a two-year community college to earn an associate's degree. Because all of the participants were also placed in at least one other transitional education course for math or English, they faced additional complexities in their educational journey. Indeed, almost half of the participants were placed in transitional education courses for all three subjects: math, reading, and English. The participants' placement in multiple transitional education classes created additional complexities. Thus, the guidance of skilled academic advisors was especially needed to help students navigate their educational journey to college completion.

Some of the participants perceived that they were not adequately advised about all the available resources and enrollment options to help them navigate through the complexities in their educational journey. This type of guidance through academic advising was keenly needed, as some of the participants reported being the first in their families to attend college. These participants may not have had guidance outside the college to help them navigate the college path. In contrast to Tinto's (1975) model of student departure, which focused on attrition at residential institutions and emphasized social integration, Bean and Metzner (1985) concluded that, for nontraditional commuter students, social integration had minimal effect on students' dropout decisions. Bean and Metzner concluded that rather than social integration, environmental variables such as family responsibilities, finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, and opportunity to transfer had more influence on attrition. As almost all the participants

were nontraditional students enrolled at a commuter community college, they were already dealing with many environmental variables such as family responsibilities, finances, and hours of employment. Compounding the problems related to these environmental variables, the students were placed in multiple transitional education courses and thus needed the guidance of skilled academic advisors in navigating the educational journey.

The complexities associated with being placed in multiple transitional education courses were critical for the participants. One complexity for the study participants was their placement in the transitional education reading course. With regard to the three transitional education subject areas—math, reading, and English—the need for improvement in reading comprehension skills is the "most serious barrier to degree completion" (Condition of Education, 2004, p. 63). A skilled academic advisor could have provided guidance to ensure that the participants were enrolled in the transitional education reading class, as a priority, before enrollment in any other transitional education course.

Another complexity related to placement in transitional education courses was that some of the participants were also military veterans. As military veterans, these participants needed to meet additional college guidelines to receive their military education benefits. A skilled academic advisor could have provided guidance or resource people to ensure that the military veteran participants enrolled in the transitional education reading class also met the Veterans Administration (VA) guidelines for receiving their education benefits.

An additional complexity related to placement in transitional education courses was the fact that college-level courses for the participants' college major required the successful completion of the transitional education courses. A skilled academic advisor could have provided guidance to ensure that the participants enrolled in the transitional education reading class were informed about areas in which some of the transitional education courses were paired with college-level courses that could possibility be required for the student's college major. Also, another option that a skilled academic advisor could have explained to the participants would be enrollment in accelerated courses to advance more quickly to college-level courses.

A further complexity related to participants' placement in multiple transitional education courses was the need to complete the sequence of courses. In a longitudinal study based on an analysis of data from more than 250,000 students from 57 colleges in seven states, researchers found that only 3 to 4 of every 10 students completed the sequence of transitional education courses (Bailey et al., 2008). According to the longitudinal study, the primary reason students did not complete the sequence was not because they failed a course but because they did not enroll in the first transitional course in sequence or because they passed the course but failed to enroll in the next subsequent course (Bailey et al., 2008). Because the participants were already enrolled in the highest level of the transitional education reading sequence, they needed only to pass the class to exit the reading course sequence. A skilled academic advisor could have provided guidance to ensure the participants were aware of the consequences if they did not complete the sequence of transitional education courses.

All the participants were placed in multiple transitional education classes, thereby creating additional complexities in their educational journey. The participants' placement in the multiple transitional education classes created additional complexities that could negatively affect the already perilous likelihood of their college completion. Thus, intervention through the guidance of a skilled academic advisor was especially needed to help the students navigate their educational journey. The participants needed information from an academic advisor in areas such as the importance of enrollment in the transitional education reading class before or along with the other transitional education courses, ways to meet the VA guidelines for education benefits, enrollment in learning community or accelerated classes, and consequences for failing to exit from the sequence of transitional education classes. Many of the participants perceived that academic advising was not helpful in navigating the complexities of the college process for students placed in multiple transitional education courses.

Discussion of Findings

As noted in Chapter I, there are several problems related to transitional education in higher education. The problems identified were role and scarcity of state funding, college completion rates, cost of transitional education to taxpayers and students, and the sequence of transitional education courses. The five findings that relate to the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses addressed the problem of college completion.

As discussed in finding one, students enrolled in transitional education reading courses were cognizant that they may have deficiencies in areas such as college preparation, reading comprehension skills, and the transition to college. For some

students, this awareness of their deficiencies in college preparation and reading comprehension skills was not readily acceptable as something within their control. Initially, some students credited their inability to meet the cutoff score on the college placement test on the placement test itself. In other words, it was the test's fault. However, over time between the college placement test and participation in the transitional education reading class, many of these students changed their perception and developed the realization that their deficiencies were a result of their own academic effort. Since the majority of the students in the community college are nontraditional students, they often began their educational journey with family and work obligations that required time and effort, which now required a transition to college. However, in spite of these challenges, students were enthused to be enrolled in college for academic improvement and attain a college degree to reach their career goals.

In finding two, students overwhelmingly held the belief that an internal force such as academic effort was a key factor in academic achievement for themselves, their classmates, and students exempt from transitional education courses. To a lesser extent, students held the belief that external forces such as parenting, inherent intelligence, or enrollment in college immediately following high school graduation had a positive influence in the academic achievement of students who were exempt from transitional education courses. The belief that some students excel in college as a result of external forces outside of their control, can lead some students in transitional education courses to perceive that academic achievement and college completion was out of their control.

As discussed in finding three, the students overcame personal and educational challenges to enroll in college to attain a college degree required for their long-term

career goals. However, there was a disconnection between their short-term and long-term goals. The lack of mastery experiences of the short-term goals can negatively effect on the long-term goal of college completion. However, assistance with goal development can strengthen the development and connection between short-term and long–term goals.

In the discussion for finding four, students based their perceptions of how others viewed

their own intelligence on interactions with several subgroups. After limited interactions with college staff, students were enrolled in transitional education reading courses, not considered courses for high achievers. However, since they enrolled in college, in the interactions with their extended family, they were perceived as high achievers. This role conflict is substantive since it can affect the self-efficacy of students enrolled in transitional education courses during their educational journey to college completion.

For finding five, students in the transitional education reading courses may be first-generation college students and at the same time are placed in multiple transitional education courses. Thus, they need extensive guidance, especially during the initial enrollment in college from academic advising. However, students did not perceive that academic advising was helpful during course selection such as accelerating the sequence of the transitional education courses and the identification of campus resources during their educational journey to college completion.

Transitional education in higher education has been the subject of debate for many years. The stakeholders debate on the role of state funding, cost to taxpayers and students, whether the K-12 system is responsible for students not learning basic skills, and effectiveness of transitional education in college. It is not debatable that the need for

transitional education is prominent in higher education and its influence on college completion. The findings provide a discussion on the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college to transition them to college completion.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. One limitation was that participants volunteered to be a part of the study and agreed to meet during a time outside class time; therefore, the participants were likely the motivated and engaged students in the class. Different students, perhaps those less motivated and engaged, could provide different findings. Second, students were recruited and interviewed at various times during the semester such as the beginning, middle, or end of the semester. Thus, the time during the semester of the interviews could affect the findings. For example, students interviewed at the end of the semester could have been more reflective and appreciative of the benefits of the transitional education reading class and the class outcomes. Third, the study was limited to one of the three main subjects for transitional education courses, that is, reading. As a result, the findings are not generalized for math and English transitional education courses. Also, the study was conducted at one community college in a southeastern state in the United States. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other colleges and universities. Finally, the study focused on the participants' voices; the study did not include interviews from college administrators, faculty, or college staff to provide a perspective from these stakeholders. Therefore, the findings were based primarily on data collected from the participants in the study.

Recommendations for Actions

There are seven recommendations for action based on the researcher's observations in completing this study. One recommendation is for faculty to conduct a socio-psychological class activity with students enrolled in transitional education reading classes. The activity should be completed early in the semester, preferably during the first three weeks of the semester. Also, the activity should provide an opportunity for students to write and share their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on pertinent topics such as goal development and the self-theories of intelligence to build the self-efficacy needed for their educational journey. Second, there should be a professional development activity for faculty that focuses on the importance of positive reinforcement and interaction. The professional development should not focus on the subject content of the class, but more on the influence of interaction between reading instructors and students. The third recommendation is for administrators of academic advising and transitional education to collaborate on the development of a resource document geared for students placed in transitional education courses. The resource document should be student friendly and should clearly detail the various registration options and available resources. Then, all the academic advisors and their assistants would have this information to share and distribute to students placed in transitional education classes. The fourth recommendation is that more opportunities should be provided for students to take accelerated transitional education courses. Further, these courses should be connected to the most basic courses across the various majors so that students placed in transitional education courses can get started in their college majors.

The next recommendation is that the students should be able to receive college credits for the transitional education reading courses. If offered college credit for the transitional education course, students would perceive the class as being as valuable as the college-level courses. Sixth, the transitional education reading course should have a different name that does not include "reading" in the course name. For some college students, there is a stigma attached to taking a reading class as an adult learner in college; the revised course name should be more reflective of the learning components covered in the class without revealing that the student is taking a reading class. Also, the term "developmental" should be replaced with "transitional" across the college. Seventh, students who are placed in the transitional education reading class should have refresher options such as a reading comprehension skills refresher booklet available to them in the testing center, or a refresher course for two-weeks either online or face-to-face. Simply allowing students to retest may not be as beneficial as providing a resource so they can refresh their knowledge before taking the retest. Finally, the eighth recommendation is college staff should receive professional development training on the influence of their interactions with students enrolled in transitional education courses. A college-wide professional development approach to the influence of interactions can create the collective efficacy needed by students to reach their goal of college completion.

Recommendation One: A Socio-psychological Intervention Activity Should be Implemented Early in the Semester

Because students are faced early in their educational journey with placement in the transitional education reading class as a result of not meeting the cut-off score on the college placement test, their sense of lack of preparation for college and lack of reading

comprehension skills is reinforced. Thus, their academic self-efficacy and sense of belonging in college can be negatively influenced. A socio-psychological intervention activity is needed early during the semester to address students' beliefs and thoughts about topics related to their educational journey. A social-psychological intervention has been described as "brief exercises that do not teach academic content but instead target students' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in and about school" (Yeager & Walton, 2011, p. 268).

Certain guidelines should be followed to maximize the potential for the activity to be most effective. One, the activity should be implemented by a reading instructor who values the students and believes in their potential to persist and excel in college. Second, the activity should not stigmatize students because of placement in the class. Also, the activity should not be introduced as one designed to help them feel positive about themselves. For example, it should be introduced as a way for them to help a high school student who is contemplating attending college. Because it takes place in a reading class, such an activity is an excellent opportunity to share basic and appropriate-level reading assignments and to have group discussions on Dweck's self-theories of intelligence, goal development, and self-efficacy. The activity should be brief and completed within the first few weeks of the semester. Afterwards, students should not be required to share the outcome of their activity, but there could be a class discussion so that students could reflect on anything they would like to share about the process of completing the activity.

A sample socio-psychological intervention activity was created for this study (see Figure 4). The activity would be implemented after reading assignments and group discussion on Dweck's self-theories of intelligence: entity theory (intelligence is fixed or

unchangeable) and incremental theory (intelligence is malleable or changeable). There also would be a discussion on the difference between short-term and long-term goals and how to set short-term goals that are directly connected to long-term goals. After the reading assignments and group discussion, students should be given the socio-psychological intervention activity.

GIFTS, My Educational Journey

Your help is needed to motivate a student who is struggling with his or her studies in high school but is still interested in attending college. You can help in sharing your educational journey by writing a letter of support and encouragement to the high school student. Before you write your letter, reflect on your educational journey by responding to the topics below in the GIFTS: A Self-Reflection. In your letter to the student, mention your GIFTS. Thank you for sharing the GIFTS from your educational journey with a future college student.

GIFTS: A Self-Reflection

Goals: My long-term goal that will be completed in five years is _____

My short-term goal that is connected to my long-term goal and will be completed within six months to one year is _____

Intelligence**:** I have a growth mind-set about intelligence because I _____

Family**:** The family members (and/or friends) who motivate and encourage me are _____

Transition**:** I made the transition to college at this point in my life because _____

Self-efficacy**:** I know that I will persist and graduate from college because I will do the following things: _____

Figure 4. Sample Socio-Psychological Intervention Activity

The sample socio-psychological intervention activity was created based on the topics that emerged from the data collected from the participants in the study.

Recommendation Two: There Should be a Guide Sheet in Academic Advising Displaying All the Registration Options and Resources for Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Courses

The administrators for academic advising and transitional education should collaborate to produce a guide sheet with registration options and resources for students in transitional education courses. Some students are the first in their families to attend college, or they may not have resources outside college to navigate the college process. Students, particularly those placed in transitional education courses, often rely on skilled academic advisors to ensure that their educational journey is as smooth as possible.

Students need to know about the registration options and resources available in the community college. First, students should know that if they test into multiple transitional education courses, reading should be the priority for completion because of its influence on college persistence and completion. Second, they should be aware of the retest and appeal policy. This information should not only be communicated verbally but it should also be written and detailed in the guide sheet. Third, they should be informed about any accelerated or learning community classes offered for the transitional education courses. Fourth, students should be aware of all the resources available to them, such as tutoring and military education benefits. In the community college under study, students placed in transitional education reading classes have access to free tutoring in the college's student success center. The tutors for the transitional education reading classes are instructors for reading; they are not college students. Next, students who are placed in the lowest level of the two transitional education reading courses should know about the opportunity to test out of the next upper level transitional

education reading class if they meet certain criteria after completing the lowest level. In other words, they can "leap" over the next upper level transitional education reading class and exit the sequence for the transitional education reading courses.

In the guide sheet, students should be made aware of the consequences of not successfully passing the transitional education courses. In the community college in the study, if a student did not successfully pass the transitional education course two times, his or her record was reviewed by a support team and often an intervention was put in place with resources to help the student successfully pass the class on the third attempt. There should be immediate follow-up for students who do not enroll in the next sequence of the transitional education courses. Although academic advisors may be aware of these registration options and resources, they need to be clearly explained and reviewed with students in verbal and written form. Transitional education course enrollees not provided with information about all the available resources and registration options, given misinformation, or negative interactions with academic advisors leads to feelings of frustration for students. These feelings are detrimental to the college completion rate, which is already dismal for students enrolled in these courses.

Recommendation Three: The Importance of and Ways to Enhance Faculty Interaction with Students Should be a Part of Professional Development

Professional development should be provided for the faculty regarding the enhancement of personal and academic interactions with students enrolled in transitional education courses. Many professional development trainings are focused on components such as curriculum development, course content, or student development. Although these

components are important, there are other important components that need to be enhanced.

There should be professional development training for faculty to learn about the influence of their interactions and provide strategies to enhance their interactions with these students. Faculty could be provided information about activities that promote classroom interaction instead of reliance primarily on lecture. For example, because adults have a wealth of knowledge in different areas when they enroll in college, faculty could offer students an opportunity to share their most proud moment or to explain how they overcame a challenge and allows students to discuss a mastery experience. This type of activity would give the faculty an opportunity to provide positive reinforcement, build confidence in students, and to gain personal insight about their students. The faculty also should share their experiences so that the activity is not one-sided and the faculty can be viewed as more approachable.

Recommendation Four: Transitional Education Courses Should be Accelerated and Linked to a College Major

To assist in a timely and successful passage to the overall goal of attaining a college degree related to career goals, the transitional education courses should be accelerated and linked to a college major. As the transitional education courses have several levels in a sequence, it can take a year or more before a student is able exit the sequence of classes. In the community college in this study, there were two levels of reading, two levels of English, and three levels of math transitional education courses. If a student was placed at the lowest level in all three subjects, it might take more than a year before he or she could complete the sequence and exit all the transitional education

classes. Also, some college-level classes require the successful completion of the transitional education courses as a prerequisite to a student enrolling in the college-level course.

There are several options for acceleration of the transitional education courses. One option is to offer two levels of the transitional education subject in the same course, such as lower and upper levels of reading to be taught as one class in one semester. Another option is to link the highest level in the sequence of the transitional education course to a college-level course, such as the upper level of transitional education English linked to English 101. Also, the transitional education classes should be linked to more college-level courses in different majors. The advantage for students in the community college in this study is that the community college was well known for leading the movement in its accelerated learning programs. It might take more resources such as money, time, and training, but it would be worthwhile to expand the acceleration of transitional education courses.

Recommendation Five: The Test Center Should Offer a Refresher Option for Reading Comprehension

For some college students, they may only need a refresher experience rather than a full semester in reading to reactive their reading comprehension skills. The refresher experience could be a two weeks online or face-to-face class in reading comprehension skills. Although the community college's test center did offer a practice placement test booklet with sample questions, there also should be a refresher booklet for reading comprehension. The practice placement booklet was created by the developers of the college placement test administrated by the community college. The practice test booklet

included the purpose of the college placement test, information about testing time, and sample questions in three areas: sentence skills, reading comprehension, and math. Students could take the practice placement test booklets home for practice, and there was a computerized version of the practice available online. When a student was ready, he or she could take the college placement test in the test center. If a student was not satisfied with his or her placement scores, he or she could retake the test in that subject after 24 hours. If not satisfied with the retest scores, an option to appeal was available.

Many participants mentioned that a refresher would be beneficial rather than taking an entire semester for reading comprehension; however, merely offering a college placement test booklet for practice and the opportunity to retest the next day will most likely not suffice for students who have been out of school for an average of 10 years. Students need assistance in rebuilding their reading comprehension skills in areas such as locating the stated or implied main ideas, drawing a conclusion or inference, and identifying the purpose of a passage. For students scoring near the cut-off needed on the college placement test who need a refresher, a reading comprehension skills booklet that reviews these topics could be the resource needed to achieve the score needed on the college placement test. Students should be given the reading comprehension skills booklet, along with the college placement test booklet in the test center. After a student reviews both booklets and feels ready, he or she could take the test. Additional refresher options would be to offer a refresher course for two weeks online or face-to-face for reading comprehension skills.

Recommendation Six: The Transitional Education Reading Course Should be Worth College Credits

The transitional education reading course should be worth college credits. During the data collection process for this research study, participants received the following grades at the end of the transitional education reading course: S (satisfactory) or U (unsatisfactory), or W (withdraw) or I (incomplete), when necessary. In 2013, however, the community college's reading department faculty elected to change the grading from pass (S) or fail (U) to letter grades. Thus, starting in spring 2014, the options for grades in transitional education reading classes will be A, B, C, or F, as well as W (withdraw) or I (incomplete), when necessary. Consequently, the transitional education reading courses will reflect the same grades as some of the students' other college-level courses.

Although changing from a pass–fail grade to a letter grade is an improvement in adding credibility and value to the courses, the transitional education courses are still not worth college credits toward graduation. There are other colleges and universities that offer the transitional education courses as college credit toward graduation. This option should be investigated as a means to add additional credibility and value to the transitional education courses. If the transitional education courses were offered with college credit toward graduation, along with the letter grade, students might take such a course as seriously as any other college-level course.

Recommendation Seven: Omit "Reading" from the Name of the Transitional Education Reading Course and Change "Developmental" to "Transitional" Education Across the College

Some participants stated that because they were embarrassed, they did not share their placement in the transitional education reading class with family or friends. Although most of the participants acknowledged that they were not prepared for college and needed to improve their reading comprehension skills, enrollment in a course with the word "reading" was viewed as a public announcement that the participant had a deficiency in reading.

In the community college in this study, the common course outline listed the following requirements for the upper level transitional education reading class: completion of at least one research-based project requiring the synthesis of three or more academic sources, at least one assignment requiring students to create and present a web-based product or another form of multimedia, a minimum of three reading comprehension exams, and a comprehensive final exam. Because the course entailed reading comprehension skills, intensive writing assignments, and class presentations, the course name should have been College Communications. A course named thusly would be more aligned to the common course outline and skills covered in the class. Use of that course name also would eliminate the stigma that some students attach with placement in a reading class as an adult learner in college.

Also, the term "transitional" education should replace "developmental" education across the college. Since one of the purposes of transitional education courses is to transition students to college-level coursework. Thus, all references to developmental in

the signage, brochures, college website, and publications, should be replaced with transitional. In the community college for this study, the president of the college mentioned this recommendation of the name change was discussed at a meeting for 100 college presidents. The president mentioned that something that seemed small such as a name change to 'transitional' from 'developmental' could have a big positive effect on the students.

Recommendation Eight: College Staff Should Receive Professional Development Training on the Influence of Their Interactions with Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Courses

Some college staff, in key areas such as academic advising, records and registration, financial aid, and test center are aware of their influence on student satisfaction with the services that receive at college. However, college staff may not be aware of the power of their interactions in the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education courses. As noted by the participants in the study, college staff such as academic advisors played a significant role in the participants' educational journey because they were one of most influential staff members to aid in their transition to college. In addition to the students' reliance on accurate course selection and available resources, the academic advisors had a positive or negative influence on students based on their interactions.

Therefore, college staff in all key areas, academic advising, records and registration, financial aid, and test center should receive professional development training about the influence of their interactions, particularly with students enrolled in transitional education courses. The professional development should take place prior to

the start of each semester. An integral part of the professional development should be to have the college staff complete an activity like the GIFTS socio-psychological activity for the students. However, the activity for the college staff should foster empathy for students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Recommendations for Future Research

Because of the significant number of students involved, the substantial cost, and the effect of transitional education courses on students' educational journey, this topic warrants further research. Most of the recommendations for future research are based on the limitations of this study as well as specific topics that need to be explored in the field of transitional education.

There are several recommendations for future research that can make valuable contributions in the field of transitional education. One recommendation for future research is to conduct a study that is similar to this research study but including students at a four-year college or university instead of a two-year community college. A similar study at a four-year college or university might involve students with different characteristics, particularly if it were a residential college with students living on campus. Another recommendation is to conduct a qualitative research study with a comparison and contrast evaluation of perceptions of intelligence and self-efficacy held by students who are and students who are not enrolled in transitional education courses. A third recommendation is to conduct a longitudinal research study similar to this research study but to follow up yearly over five years with the participants during their educational journey to a college degree. A fourth recommendation, since the participants were probably the more motivated students in the classes, is to conduct a similar qualitative

study for students enrolled in transitional education reading classes who are not passing the courses in the community college.

There are also other topics that need to be further explored for future research that can make a valuable contribution to the field of transitional education. A recommendation for future research is to further explore topics related to transitional education courses with regard to acceleration, college placement, retention, multimedia, course delivery, online instruction, and student engagement. These recommendations for future research might diverge in methodology and topics but should converge in a collaborative effort to lead toward a higher persistence and college completion rate for students enrolled in transitional education courses.

Summary and Conclusion

Although higher education of the masses has afforded many individuals the opportunity to pursue a college degree as a means to a better future, it also has created additional roadblocks on the educational journey. One of the significant roadblocks is that many individuals learn early in their educational journey that, although they are emotionally prepared, they are not academically prepared for the educational journey. Thus, they are placed in transitional education courses to prepare them to tackle the rigors of college-level coursework. This phenomenon of underprepared college students is not a recent trend; in fact, it is rooted in the history of higher education and was first addressed at some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the United States. Nevertheless, placement in transitional education courses has continued to grow significantly, affected the mass education of many adult learners, cost the individuals and taxpayers a significant amount of money, and generated a dismal college completion rate.

This qualitative study of 20 participants enrolled in transitional education reading classes in the community college focused on their perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy. The study resulted in five findings. The first finding revealed that the educational journey of students enrolled in transitional education reading courses was shaped by the recognition of deficiencies in academic performance, but remained committed to academic improvement. The next finding revealed that students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceived that other students' academic performance was based on internal forces such as academic effort and external forces such as parenting, inherent intelligence, and no gap before enrollment in college. Third, goal development to support long-term career aspirations was lacking among transitional education reading students. The fourth finding suggested that interactions with various subgroups, including college staff/faculty and extended family, affected the educational journey of transitional education reading students. Finally, deficiencies in academic advising negatively affected the educational journey of transitional education reading students as they navigated enrollment in multiple transitional education courses. These findings, based on responses from the participants in the study, provide a better understanding of students who are enrolled in transitional education reading courses, including their perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy.

Although the selected community college for this study was known for its leadership, innovation, and research-based approach to transitional education, the participants in the study provided the catalyst for recommendations for improvement. One recommendation was the implementation of a socio-psychological intervention activity early in the semester. Such an activity would not focus on the academic content

but rather on the students' beliefs, feelings, and thoughts regarding college and life. Also, students should be provided a guide sheet in academic advising with all the registration options and resources for students enrolled in transitional education courses. Next, the importance of and ways to enhance faculty interactions with students should be a part of professional development. The participants based their perception regarding how the faculty viewed students' intelligence on these interactions. Additionally, transitional education courses should be accelerated and linked to a college major. Most students do not enroll in college to focus on taking transitional education courses. Therefore, to promote students' motivation to attain a college degree, students should be accelerated to their college major.

Next, the test center should offer a refresher booklet for reading comprehension. Simply providing a test booklet with sample test questions might not suffice for students who need a refresher in their reading comprehension skills. In addition to letter grades, the transitional education courses should be worth college credits. Also, the term "developmental" should be replaced with term "transitional" across the college. Based on the extensive coursework detailed in the common course outline for the transitional education reading course, the course should be worth college credit toward graduation. Finally, the word "reading" should be omitted from the course name of the transitional education reading course. As evidenced in the common course outline, students enrolled in the transitional education reading courses learned more than how to strengthen their reading comprehension skills. They learned research writing and oral presentation. Thus, the course name should reflect the combination of reading, writing, and oral presentation skills, which constitute college communications. Furthermore, the revised

course name would diminish the stigma that some adult learners feel about taking a transitional education reading course in college. Additionally, college staff should receive professional development training on the influence of their interactions with students enrolled in transitional education courses. This study, based on the participants' voices provides a greater understanding of the key elements in the educational journey of the participants enrolled in transitional education reading classes beyond the notion that they were simply not prepared for college-level coursework in reading. The stakeholders hold a responsibility to these students to implement wide-spread, effective programs for transitional education, fund future research, and seek to better understand the influence of students' experiences on the road to college persistence and completion.

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Appendix A

Crosswalk of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research question (RQ1) and Subsets of Research Questions (SRQs)	RQ1	SRQa	SRQb	SRQc	SRQd
1. What can you tell me about yourself?					
a. How would you describe your education so far?					
b. How do you feel about school?					
c. What are your career goals?					
d. Who has influenced you?					
2. How do you feel about being part of the study?					
3. Why did you decide to enroll in this college now?	X				
4. Who or what do you perceive as your support network as a college student?	X				
a. How do you perceive your family as supportive?					
b. How do you perceive your family, employer, or people in the community as supportive?					
5. How do you feel about your preparation for college-level courses?	X	X			
a. What were your overall experiences like in class?					
6. Why do you think that you tested into the reading course?	X	X			
a. Did you test into any other transitional education courses like math or English?					
7. How did you feel when you learned that you had to enroll in a transitional education reading course?	X	X			
a. Did you tell anyone?					
b. Did you reconsider attending college?					
8. How do you feel about your intelligence as a college student?				X	
a. Can you give me an example or story to explain how you feel?					
9. How do you feel about your reading comprehension?				X	
a. How do you feel about reading in general?					
10. How do you feel about the intelligence of other students who are enrolled in your reading course?				X	
a. Can you give me an example or story to explain how you feel?					
11. Why do you think that some students test out of the reading course?				X	
12. How do you feel about the intelligence of other students who do not need to enroll in transitional education reading courses?			X		
13. How do you feel about students who seem to go			X		

through college without much difficulty?				
14. How do you perceive the college's staff perception of your intelligence?			X	
15. How do you perceive the college's faculty (professors) perception of your intelligence?			X	
16. How do you perceive peers and family perception of your intelligence?			X	
17. How do you perceive society's perception of your intelligence?			X	
18. In what ways do you support your learning?	X			X
a. Can you provide an example, such as you learned how you learn as a student?				
19. How do you develop long-term goals to support your learning?	X			X
a. Can you provide an example?				
20. How do you develop short-term or smaller goals to support your learning?	X			X
a. Can you provide an example?				
21. How do you feel about the effect this course will have on your ability to successfully complete college-level courses?	X			X
a. What is your attendance like in the course?				
b. How many days have you been absent from class?				
22. Do you have any questions?				
a. When I talked about the topics, were there other things that you wanted to talk about?				

Appendix B

Interview Protocol and Guide

The overarching goal for the study is to explore how community college students enrolled in transitional education reading classes describe the elements in their experiences in their educational journey.

1. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses describe their educational journey?

The following subset of research questions are important to address in order to understand the main research question as it relates to students' educational journey:

a. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional
   education reading courses perceive their intelligence?

b. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive the intelligence of other students?

c. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive other's perceptions of their own intelligence (the college, faculty, peers, family, society)?

d. How and in what ways do community college students enrolled in transitional education reading courses perceive their academic self-efficacy?

The interview protocol to be utilized will follow the attached interview script.

Sample Script (R: Researcher; S: Student)

R: Hello, I am Yvette and I am working on a research study with The George Washington University. I am very interested in learning about your experiences in the community college, specifically your perceptions on intelligence and academic effort.

R: I hope that the results from this research study will help college faculty, administrators, and staff better understand the educational journey of students enrolled in reading classes in

the community college.

R: Just a reminder, this interview will be tape recorded so that I can truly listen to your answers to my research questions and not be busy with taking notes. I want to be engaged while listening to your stories. I will be jotting down key words and ideas to help me begin the data analysis process. I want to be clear that you can be truthful and honest about your experiences at this college.

What can you tell me about yourself?
How would you describe your education so far?
How do you feel about school?
What are your career goals?
Who has influenced you?
How do you feel about being part of the study?
Why did you decide to enroll in this college now?
Who or what do you perceive as your support network as a college student?
How do you perceive your family as supportive?
How do you perceive your family, employer, or people in the community as supportive?
How do you feel about your preparation for college-level courses?
What were your overall experiences like in class?
Why do you think that you tested into the reading course?
Did you test into any other transitional education courses like math or English?
How did you feel when you learned that you had to enroll in a transitional

education reading course?
Did you tell anyone?
Did you reconsider attending college?
How do you feel about your intelligence as a college student?
Can you give me an example or story to explain how you feel?
How do you feel about your reading comprehension?
How do you feel about reading in general?
How do you feel about the intelligence of other students who are enrolled in your reading course?
Can you give me an example or story to explain how you feel?
Why do you think that some students test out of the reading course?
How do you feel about the intelligence of other students who do not need to enroll in transitional education reading courses?
How do you feel about students who seem to go through college without much difficulty?
How do you perceive the college's staff perception of your intelligence?
How do you perceive the college's faculty (professors) perception of your intelligence?
How do you perceive peers and family perception of your intelligence?
How do you perceive society's perception of your intelligence?
In what ways do you support your learning?
Can you provide an example, such as you learned how you learn as a student?
How do you develop long-term goals to support your learning?
Can you provide an example?
How do you develop short-term or smaller goals to support your learning?
Can you provide an example?
How do you feel about the effect this course will have on your ability to successfully
complete college-level courses?
What is your attendance like in the course?
How many days have you been absent from class?
Do you have any questions?
When I talked about the topics, were there other things that you wanted to talk about?

Appendix C

Code Book

Code	Description
ATTEND-IMPORTANCE	Students described the importance of class attendance
ACADEMIC ADVISING	Students described some issues they had with advising
GAP-CHALLENGE	Students expressed that the time between enrollment in college and their last educational institution created some transitional challenges
GAP-TIME	Students stated the time between enrollment in college and their last educational institution
GOALS-COLLEGE DEGREE	Students described goals that required a college degree
INTEL-CLASSMATES-BEHAVE	Students stated classmates' classroom behavior was related to their intelligence
INTEL-CLASSMATES-EFFORT	Students stated classmates' efforts was related to their intelligence
INTEL-CLASSMATES-HIGH	Students had high regard for classmates' intelligence
INTEL-CLASSMATES-NO-CRED	Students expressed classmates' lack of effort was related to the reading class not being worth any college credit
INTEL-OTHERS-BORN	Stated that students exempt from reading classes- intelligence is something with which one is born
INTEL-OTHERS-EFFORT	Stated that students exempt from reading classes- intelligence was related to these students' effort
INTEL-OTHERS-PARENTS	Stated that students were exempt from reading classes- intelligence was related to good parenting
INTEL-OTHERS-NO GAP	Stated that students were exempt from reading class-Intelligence was based on no gap from high school to college

INTEL-THEIR-EFFORT	Students stated that their intelligence was related to their efforts
INTEL-THEIR-FAMILY/PEERS	Students stated that family/peers have high regard for their intelligence
INTEL-THEIR-FACULTY	Students described faculty's interaction with them and how it related to faculty's perception of their intelligence
INTEL-THEIR-GRADE/AVER	Students stated their grades or average in the reading class
INTEL-THEIR-S/S-DNK	Students stated that college staff and people in society did not know them well enough to know their intelligence
INTEL-THEIR-S/S-LOW	Students stated that college staff and people in society held a low regard for their intelligence
LIFE CHANGE EVENT	Students enrolled in college because of a life changing event
OTHER TRANS ED-HIGH	A high number of students were placed in other transitional education classes
PLACEMENT-REACT-NEG	Students described a negative reaction to college placement test results
PLACEMENT-INTEL	Students expressed college placement test results were not a reflection on their intelligence
PREP COLLEGE-NO	Students stated that they were not prepared for college
READ CLASS-HELP	Students stated that the reading class was helpful in preparing them for college-level courses
READ COMP-NOT GOOD	Students stated their reading comprehension skills were not good
STUDY SKILLS	Students stated study skills to support their learning

SUPPORT-FAMILY	Students stated their family was a major part of their support network
SUPPORT-FAITH	Students stated their faith in religion were a major part of their support network

Appendix D

Research Consent Form

IRB #:

Title of Research Project:
Perceptions on Intelligence and Self-Efficacy: A Qualitative Study of Students Enrolled in Transitional Education Reading Courses in the Community College

Project Contact:

Acquelnetta Yvette Myrick, Candidate, Ed.D., Graduate School of Education Development and Human Development at The George Washington University. E-mail: aymyrick@gwmail.gwu.edu. In partial fulfillment of course requirements under the supervision of Dr. Rick Jakeman, Dissertation Chair and Assistant Professor. The George Washington University, Foggy Bottom Campus, Washington, District of Columbia 20052. Contact: 202-994-5123 or rjakeman@gwu.edu

You are invited to take part in a research project lead by Acquelnetta Yvette Myrick and Dr. Rick Jakeman in the Graduate School of Education Development and Human Development at The George Washington University. You are being asked if you want to take part in this study because you are enrolled in a College Reading II class, at least 18 years of age, and enrolled in the community college as a student. Please read this form and ask me any questions that will help you decide if you want to take part of the study.

Purpose of this Research Study:

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences in the educational journey of students who enroll in transitional education reading courses in the community college.

Procedures for this Research Study:

The study involves research. One 45-60 minute face-to-face interview will be conducted over the course of one day. The interview will be recorded by audiotapes and hand written notes.

Potential Benefits:

You will have the opportunity to openly express and discuss your educational journey. The discussion will help create a profile for students who are enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. It is my desire that the results from this study be of benefit to instructors, community college administrators and staff, and most importantly, the students.

Possible risks:

If you feel some discomfort answering the interview questions because the topics will explore your experiences as a student and perceptions on intelligence, you are free to skip any questions, terminate the interview, or withdraw from the study.

Alternative Procedures:

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence. Your academic standing will not be affected in any way should you choose not to take part or to withdraw at any time. If you agree to take part in the study, you will receive a $10 College Bookstore gift card for your time and effort.

Confidentiality:

There is a small chance that someone not on the research team could find out that you took part in the study or somehow connect your name with the information that I collect about you, however the following steps are being taken to reduce this risk:

To protect your confidentiality, I will ensure that the audiotapes and transcripts are destroyed upon transcription and final data analysis. Your name will not appear in the interview transcript. The interview transcript will be reviewed by the researcher and the dissertation chair. A transcriptionist will be hired to confidentially transcribe the audiotapes.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact Acquelnetta Yvette Myrick at aymyrick@gwmail.gwu.edu or Consent to Take Part in the Study:

Federal guidelines and The George Washington University Institutional Review Board guidelines require an informed consent to perform social research and research projects which involve human subjects.

Some quotes may be used from the research project. However, you will not be identified by personal information.

After the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits have been explained, your willingness to participate in this research study is implied if you proceed with completing the interview.

Appendix E

E-mail of Invitation to Reading Faculty/Reading Department Chair

Dear Reading Faculty/Reading Department Chair:

A transitional (developmental) educational reading class is an integral learning experience for students enrolled in the class that enhances academic, social, and personal development. To learn about the elements of students' experiences, specifically their perceptions of intelligence and academic self-efficacy, I would like to conduct one face-to-face interview with the students enrolled in College Reading II classes in the community college. The data collected will be used to complete my doctoral dissertation at The George Washington University.

I realize that a students' time is valuable, so I would like to accommodate the students outside their class commitments. I would schedule the students' face-to-face interviews outside of the class time during the last few weeks of the semester in a convenient and quiet location to audio tape face-to-face interviews.

It would be greatly appreciative if I could make an announcement in two College Reading II classes and distribute a flyer to the students about the research study. Attached is the flyer to the participants and the consent form that explains the scope of the study.

Appendix F

Announcement to the Class

Hello, my name is Acquelnetta Yvette Myrick. I am a doctoral student at the George Washington University.

Would you like to be part of research study? If you are enrolled in a College Reading II class, at least 18 years of age, and enrolled in the community college as a student, then you are eligible to be part of the research project.

The interview will focus on your perceptions of intelligence and academic effort. The interview will last approximately one hour, and will be audio taped. If you agree to be part of the research project, you will receive a consent form so that you understand that you are part of a research project. Your willingness to participate in this research study is implied if you proceed with completing the interview.

You will receive a $10 College Bookstore gift card for your time and effort.

If you wish to be part of the research project, please contact me at the email address that is listed on the flyer.

Appendix G

Flyer to Prospective Participants

Hello, College Reading II Students

Are you:

* enrolled in a College Reading II class,

* at least 18 years of age, and

* currently enrolled in the community college as a college student?

If you answered yes to these questions, then you are qualified to take part in a research study.

The study includes a 45-60 minutes interview about your perceptions on intelligence and academic effort.

Participants must agree to be audio taped, and will receive a consent form.

Each participant will be compensated with a $10 College Bookstore gift card for his or her time.

If you would like to take part in this study, please contact Acquelnetta Yvette Myrick at

aymyrick@gwmail.gwu.edu

to schedule a time and location for your interview.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Appendix H

Reminder E-mail about Interview to Participants

Thank you for agreeing to take part in a research project on students enrolled in transitional education reading courses in the community college. The research project is directed by Acquelnetta Yvette Myrick, doctoral candidate at The George Washington University.

Your 45-60 minute interview has been scheduled for _____ (date) at _____ (time) at _____(location on campus).

Should an emergency arise and you are unable to keep this interview time, please contact me immediately so that we can reschedule. You can email me at aymyrick@gwmail.gwu.edu or call me at _____.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this research project. You will receive a $10 College Bookstore gift card for your honest opinions of your student experiences in the community college.

Appendix I

Follow-up Recruitment E-mail after Class Announcement

Dear Student,

As you may recall, I came to visit your class and made a class announcement about my research study. Would you like to take part in the research study? If you are currently enrolled in a College Reading II class in the community college as a student and at least 18 years of age, then I would like to interview you. The interview will focus on your perceptions of intelligence and academic effort. The interview will last for approximately one hour and will be audio taped.

Each participant will receive a consent form so that he or she understands that he or she is taking part in a research project and is giving permission to be interviewed and audio taped.

Each participant will be compensated $10 College Bookstore gift card for his or her time.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact Acquelnetta Yvette Myrick at aymyrick@gwmail.gwu.edu