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# A Study of the Academic and Personal Impacts of a Literacy Intervention Course: Stories from Stakeholders

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A STUDY OF THE ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL IMPACTS  
OF A LITERACY INTERVENTION COURSE:  
STORIES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

By  
Jeremy Ray Logsdon

August 2016

A STUDY OF THE ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL IMPACTS  
OF A LITERACY INTERVENTION COURSE:  
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Dedicated to my son, my wife, and my parents

I could not have done this without you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation, much like my education in general, has been bookended by many things. It starts with the trivial. I wrote my prospectus on a cold, snowy day in late January, writing and researching in the dining room while my wife and son played in the living room and watched *The Lego Movie* on repeat all day long. The final words of my dissertation were written in early summer, isolated in my office with the occasional break to watch a few minutes of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* or the Rifftrax version of *Titanic* to keep me laughing.

My parents started my education, reading to me as a young boy. I am so grateful that I was raised in a house of readers. I was the first person in my family to go to and graduate college, and along with so many other things, I could never have done any of this without my parents. Without your help, love, and support, this would remain just a dream, and I thank you so much for everything you have given me. More importantly, I also thank you for instilling in me a love of God. This dissertation, along with everything else in my life, has only been achieved by His grace and glory.

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This study aims to illuminate, via the qualitative method of portraiture, the academic and personal impacts of both faculty and student stakeholders of a literacy intervention course, offered as an alternative to the traditional developmental reading model, taught at a regional southeastern United States four-year public university. Students who enrolled in the course from the semesters of fall 2012 to fall 2015 were given the opportunity to complete a survey about their experiences with the literacy intervention course. Faculty stakeholders were interviewed for their perspective on course creation, implementation, and delivery, focusing on the six curricular core competencies of reading strategies and reading guides; book club discussion; formal presentations; academic writing and research; motivation and responsibility; and work ethic and habit building.

Utilizing the portraiture paradigm, the researcher crafted a narrative of the faculty and student stakeholders to “draw a picture” of the course and the experiences of those who have participated in it. When examined through the lens of Tinto’s theories of student success and the theory of transformational learning, the aesthetic whole of the course is unearthed, with extensive narrative from faculty and students alike to complete the narrative.

The findings of this study offers insight into the perspectives of those deeply involved with the literacy intervention course. Students largely identified the course as influential on their success, with individual comments from students detailing specific elements of the course that impacted them.

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **The Impact of Reading on Collegiate Success**

Higher Education professors and instructors have long recognized the importance of reading in college. Myriad examples of educators bemoaning the struggles of students' reading and comprehending texts fill the literature. In a study by Hoeft (2012), even when students read, they frequently fail to comprehend what they read. This study found that while 46% of students indicated that they had read the required reading, only 55% of these students could demonstrate even basic comprehension of the text.

These findings are not unusual. Some studies show that providing even minimal teacher support for the reading has a positive impact on student comprehension and performance (Ryan, 2006). The implication is simple yet quite serious. Students will not read without direct instruction or motivation to do so, despite the overwhelming evidence that reading increases both general and domain-specific content knowledge (Doolittle, Hicks, Triplett, Nichols, & Young, 2006; Richardson, 2004; Ryan 2006). Underprepared and under-practiced students coming to college and either putting forth little effort or finding no assistance in increasing their reading practice remains common in the college classroom. Whether the issue of underpreparation falls upon the student or the institution is not the issue at the moment. If colleges wish to retain these underprepared students, then institutions must develop strategies to address deficient reading skills.

The reasons why students do not read are varied. One reason frequently cited for lack of compliance with reading assignments is a lack of reading comprehension skills (Lei, Bartlett, Gorney, & Herschbach, 2010). A logical assumption would be that if a student struggles with understanding and fully grasping what they read, then the desire to

comply with reading assignments decreases. Students report being overwhelmed by the readings and complain of difficulties in understanding the reading due to vocabulary and text complexity. There are some who will actually read the entire chapter but understand and internalize virtually none of it (Ryan, 2006). Reading without comprehension is no better than failing to read at all. This issue with reading in the post-secondary realm is further compounded when considering that many college professors and instructors self-report that they either no longer require reading or do not have any type of contingency in place for those students who simply choose not to read (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000). Aside from the obvious problems with professors no longer requiring reading simply due to student noncompliance, reading occurs at a continually lessening pace in the college classroom.

The bigger issue of students failing to read or being under-practiced in reading is actually far more serious than that of non-compliance or lack of practice in reading. Deficient knowledge and expertise in reading may also signal deficiency in critical thinking skills (Goodman, Fries, & Strauss, 2016). Reading, at its most basic level, is an interaction between thought and language. The students who perform poorly on the reading section of the ACT may be scoring poorly because they have not yet been taught to properly read or to think critically. Most students who make it to college, even those mandated by their test scores to take a remedial reading course, do not need to learn *how* to read. They need to learn how to think critically as they read (Commeyras, 1993; Johnson, Archibald, & Tenebaum, 2010; Moore, 2013; Tang, 2016). Students frequently fail to engage with their texts in a way that leads to comprehension, and as such, they begin to avoid reading as they view it as an unimportant act. Beneficial literacy



interventions should focus more on teaching students to evaluate their reading, seek clarification on their own, and refer to text as a tool to increase knowledge. Students are often conflicted with the realization that the answers are within the text but that they possess limited practice in extracting the information needed (Ivey & Fisher, 2006). Students frequently have greater practical and world experience than their reading knowledge indicates. The disparity between student age and reading practice can swiftly deteriorate into a shameful problem for the student, which in turns leads to a greater difficulty in acknowledging and addressing the root issue of underpreparation in reading.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to a report from Complete College America (2012), approximately 1.7 million students begin college with an academic need that mandates remedial education. Many of these students never reach graduation. At community colleges, more than 50 percent of enrolling freshmen need intervention, and at four-year universities, nearly 20 percent are placed in remedial coursework. Many students are so disappointed at being labeled as remedial students that they never even attend college. Less than a third of students that need a single remedial course graduate with a Bachelor's degree within six years (Complete College America, 2012). This creates a significant financial hardship for universities, students who stop-out, and ultimately society itself.

The current status of remediation and higher education remains a problem today. Retention has become a tremendously heavy focus in all institutions of higher education (Cochran, Campbell, Baker, & Leeds, 2014; Codjoe & Helms, 2005; DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka; 2004; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Kerby, 2015; Olbrecht, Romano, & Teigen, 2016; Tinto, 2005; Seidman, 2012). For the student in need of

academic remediation, however, with only one in four students needing remediation actually completing a four-year degree, there clearly exists a significant flaw in remedial education's current operation.

Stated without elaboration or flourishment, every university that alleges to educate students must do its part to retain students. Wyatt (1992) points out that some universities are addressing the declining reading comprehension rates of students by narrowing the admission criteria, only admitting those who are already capable of reading and studying at the post-secondary level. The primary issue with the narrowing of selection bias, especially for a state school, is that it ultimately limits the already shallow pool of academic talent. A better solution, rather than deny admittance, may be to conditionally admit such reading-deficient students and provide them with an immediate, swift, and aggressive supplemental or intervention reading course to help ensure their academic success and hold the educational system to accountability. Several researchers posit that such a strategy will ultimately do a better job of assisting these universities in creating a well-educated, creative, and employable graduating class rather than merely restricting access (Wyatt, 1992; Venezia, 2006). The point remains, of course, that a significantly impactful literacy intervention is required. Otherwise, universities are setting students up for failure.

One regional southeastern four-year university has recently implemented a freshman literacy intervention course for students who scored between 15 and 19 on the reading section of the ACT. ACT (2010) defines college readiness in reading as a score of 21 or higher. Kentucky Senate Bill 1 (Senate Bill 1 Highlights, 2009) defines college readiness in reading as a score of 20. Therefore, all students scoring below 20 are

deemed underprepared in reading. With the examination of the impact of this course from the perspective of the various stakeholders, primarily faculty and students, a more cohesive image of the successes of this literacy intervention course can be crafted.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is twofold: firstly, to describe the conceptualization of this literacy intervention course at a large southeastern university, from its earliest conception through eventual approval as a college course for students scoring 19 or lower on the reading section of the ACT; and secondly, to examine and describe the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of both instructors and students in the literacy intervention course. Those involved in the earliest creation and implementation of the literacy intervention course were surveyed and interviewed and a mediated discourse analysis conducted on early and current course documents to examine any evolutionary changes the course has experienced. Instructors and students also completed a survey to collect data to paint a complete portrait of the experiences of those involved with the course. With the qualitative portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), the researcher sought to find themes within the collected data and to construct a thematic framework of the overall narrative, therefore “drawing a picture” of the course and of students’ perceptions of the course’s impact on learning. The collective data of this study will help illuminate the overall theme and experiences of this literacy intervention course, as well as those involved with it, to craft a more complete narrative of the course success.

A quantitative study at the same southeastern four-year university recently described the benefits of the literacy intervention course as compared to a developmental reading course (Super, 2016). Both two-year retention status and two-year cumulative

GPA were higher for students in the literacy intervention course population as compared to those in the developmental reading course population. However, while Super (2016) clearly outlined the impact of a literacy intervention course, the study did not describe the course from the perspectives of those who have participated in its creation, implementation, and function. This study will seek out the stories, knowledge, and experience of those intimately involved with the literacy intervention course.

### **Need for the Study**

The information collected with this study will assist others in the creation of a similar course with similar goals and successes at other institutions. Student and instructor data will also help to encapsulate the wealth of benefits and successes found within the experiences of the literacy intervention course. The study will serve as a program evaluation for the literacy intervention course and aid instructors and directors in making more informed decisions about improving and expanding the scope of the course.

Edström (2008) states that most course and program evaluations function is typically aimed at the effectiveness of the instructor. While this certainly has a role in evaluating course efficiency, it by no means encompasses the entirety of a course. There is a need for an evaluation of the course, outside of the scope of teaching effectiveness, including students' reading load, fluency, self-efficacy, the selection and usage of texts, and practice. This study will identify, from the student and faculty perspective, what makes this course uniquely effective in the field of literacy intervention.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework underpinning this research is based upon two distinct issues found in the research literature on the topic of post-secondary learning and

developmental education. Numerous studies show the power of transformative events in the classroom (Blake, Sterling, & Goodson, 2013; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). These findings, merged with the best practices of literacy education and the driving factors of student success, give form to the structure and organization of this study.

### **Theoretical Relevance of Transformational Learning**

Jack Mezirow proposed a theory of transformational learning, which holds that transformational learning results in learners experiencing a significant change in themselves as learners (as cited in Clark, 1993). A literacy intervention course easily fits into this paradigm; it is not merely a means to an end, which for the students would be graduation. It is a system by which individuals are transformed from underprepared students to academicians capable of reaching their ultimate goal of graduation and becoming lifelong literacy learners.

Mezirow (2003) states that transformative learning is about the transformation of fixed assumptions about oneself as learner. Napoli and Wortman (1998) remarked that psychosocial factors exist which are positively correlated with persistence in community college students. Conscientiousness, psychological well-being, social support, and self-esteem are factors that all impact student success. More factors are at stake in student success than mere academic strengths. The literacy intervention course attempts to do more than merely progress students toward an academic goal. The course could be a crucial element in their academic transformation. Students undergoing such an academic and personal transformation must by necessity reflect critically upon themselves as learners (Mezirow, 2003). This critical self-reflection can occur in either individual or in

group interactions, both of which are afforded ample opportunity within the coursework of the literacy intervention course.

One significant aspect of the transformational learning theory posits that students must be capable of critical reflection and engagement in academic discourse (Merriam, 2004). This may initially seem that students who engaged in transformational learning must already be at an appropriate academic level. However, it merely asserts that students must be capable of change in a positive and growth-oriented direction. While the theory of transformational learning holds that students should become mature learners, take a more autonomous role in their education, and develop a higher level of thinking, the attainment of these skills is nonetheless a prerequisite for transformational learning. Key to engaging in transformational learning includes the ability to engage in premise reflection, which “involves examining long-held, socially constructed assumptions, beliefs, and values” about themselves as learners (Merriam, 2004, p. 62). One key component of the literacy intervention course postulates that students will enter as underprepared and under-practiced students and, upon successful completion, leave as lifelong readers.

While the literacy intervention course described in this study was created and implemented to positively impact student retention and success, a clear precedent for this course was established by the state legislature. In Kentucky, state institutions of higher education implemented a support for students scoring 18-19 on the reading section of the ACT, although not all of the Kentucky state universities chose to create and implement a three-hour, credit-bearing course for said students.

## **Issues of Student Success**

Many postsecondary institutions implement remedial or developmental reading programs for underprepared and under-practiced freshmen. Some schools have also had success with other academic supports related to these remediation classes, such as academic counseling and learning communities (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013). Regrettably, many researchers have also found that the requirement of remediation in a student's first year reduces the probability of graduation (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2014; Rose, 2012; Martorell, McFarlin, & Xue, 2014). Financial issues may dictate the acceptance of students who are underprepared, yet the larger issue of ensuring these students success remains out of grasp for many higher education institutions.

Researchers have presented various theories for this remediation stigma. Martorell, McFarlin, and Xue (2014) believe that one aspect of this graduation issue rests with the fact that remedial courses are frequently non-credit bearing and therefore increase time to graduation. The paradox in this is that the very course crafted to help students graduate is, in some schools, preventing them from ever graduating (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). The remedial course instead becomes a very direct, expensive, and non-credit-bearing barrier to student success.

Some research has been completed on how to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of developmental education (Rutschow & Schneider, 2011). These best practices include creating separate departments for developmental education coursework, courses built around andragogical best practices, effective advising, and ongoing programmatic course evaluations (Sperling, 2009; Schwartz & Jenkins, 2007; McCabe & Day, 1998). The ultimate realization is that developmental education does not have to be

the end of the academic road for students; it can be crafted in such a way to not only allow for student success but also to help ensure it.

### **Policy Relevance**

In 2009, the Kentucky Senate passed Senate Bill 1 (Senate Bill 1 Highlights, 2009). Senate Bill 1 introduced and modified several components of Kentucky's accountability system for higher education at the nine state universities in Kentucky (Eastern Kentucky University, Kentucky State University, Morehead State University, Murray State University, Northern Kentucky University, the University of Kentucky, the University of Louisville, Western Kentucky University, and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System). Of particular importance to this study was section 21, which stated that CPE (Council for Post-secondary Education), KBE (Kentucky Board of Education), and KDE (Kentucky Department of Education) were to:

Develop a unified strategy by May 15, 2010, to reduce college remediation rates by at least 50 percent by 2014 from the 2010 rates and increase the college completion rates of students enrolled in one or more remedial classes by three percent annually from 2009-2014. (Senate Bill 1 Highlights, 2009, p. 6)

This senate bill was intended to elicit state-wide progress toward improving college retention and graduation rates. Each university was at their own discretion as to how this intervention would occur.

### **Statement of Research Questions**

During this study, these research questions were examined and answered.

Research Question 1: What was the theoretical framework on which the literacy intervention course was conceptualized and developed?



Research Question 2: How did the theoretical framework manifest in the curricular core competencies of the course?

Research Question 3: What curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course impact student success as identified by stakeholder reporting?

Research Question 4: What transformational learning experiences do students report as a result of the literacy intervention course?

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The relationship between the existing non-credit remedial education and for-credit literacy intervention course at this university is not likely duplicated at other universities. The literacy intervention course represents a unique alternative in the form of credit hours for students in need of reading remediation services that may be unavailable at other universities. The relevance to this particular study is that the benefits of the credit-bearing literacy intervention course at this university have been clearly established (Super, 2016). This study examined the benefits of the course from the students' perspective, outside of the obvious GPA and retention impacts of the course. The principal investigator did not attempt to reconcile the experiences of these students with the overall perspective of all students from other universities in credit-bearing literacy intervention courses.

There is also the undeniable issue of student participation. Participation was incentivized with a randomized drawing for four \$50 gift cards for all students who participated in the survey, which may have falsely inflated what would have been true participation. Another compounding factor is that students were approached, via email, about completing a survey for a course they may not have taken recently. Some students

completed the literacy intervention course over three years prior. This limitation may have impacted survey response rate.

In an attempt to address some of these issues, a few components of the study were modified. All emails were sent from the instructor of record for the course, rather than the researcher, in an attempt to increase response rate. To both determine the time of completion for a typical student and ensure the validity, reliability, and clarity of all items, the primary researcher conducted a focus group with willing, current students taking the same literacy intervention course. This helped ensure that the survey was appropriate for this population and that it could be completed in an appropriate length of time.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are used within this study and are provided here for clarification.

*Automaticity*: the ability to perform a skill “unconsciously with skill and accuracy while consciously carrying on other brain functions” (Bloom, 1986, p. 70)

*Best practices*: “an example of a practice in a particular area that is regarded as exemplary and a standard against which others may be compared” (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 52)

*Content courses*: a course designed around specific subjects or topics

*Developmental*: frequently used interchangeably with remedial, “used to imply a temporary stage from which individuals will emerge with assistance” (Deil-Amen & Rosenbuam, 2002, p. 256)

*Portraiture*: “a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv)

*Practiced readers*: a reader “unaware of the underlying process [of reading] . . . until confronted by an unfamiliar word or a foreignism or a technical term, which usually requires the reader to slow down” (Barnhart & Barnhart, 2010, p. 5)

*Remediation*: “the support most widely used by colleges to address the academic needs of underprepared students” which “target underprepared students with the purpose of improving their abilities to handle college-level material and succeed in college” (Bettinger et al., 2013, p. 94)

*Retention*: “staying in school until completion of a degree” (Hagedorn, 2012, p. 83)

*Skills*: “proficiency of a complex act” (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008, p. 365)

*Strategies*: “a conscious and systematic plan” (Afflerbach et al., 2008, p. 365)

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One serves to include a brief background of the importance of reading in higher education and an overview of how the literacy intervention course at the heart of this study both addressed state policy and the transformative process it engendered in student stakeholders. The statement of the problem, need for the study, definitions of terms and abbreviations used throughout this dissertation, and the overall organization were also included. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature, specifically addressing the following issues: the history of remedial education, deficiencies of the current remedial education model, and best practices of literacy intervention. Chapter Three outlines the organization and overall

methodology of this study, including participation selection; methodologies for data collection and analysis, specifically portraiture; descriptions and creation processes of survey instruments; the role of the researcher; and ethical considerations. Chapter Four gives the findings of the student stakeholder surveys and faculty stakeholder interviews. In closing, Chapter Five contains a discussion of the findings; implications for course creation, administrators, instructions, and course expansions; and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

This review of the literature will look at some of the varied elements that are worthy of consideration when discussing and studying developmental and remedial coursework and the impact they can have on various stakeholders. This chapter is divided into three sections which roughly describe developmental education from the past to the present and into future needs. The first section examines the history of remedial education. The second section describes the deficiencies of remedial education and the perception of such courses in today's academic climate. This section concludes with a discussion of the unique issues impacting international students. The third section examines the best practices for a literacy intervention, addressing non-academic needs, research-based best practices, and the role of auxiliary supports for literacy students.

### **History of Remedial Education**

From the earliest days of the Phoenician alphabet over 4,000 years ago to the advent of the printing press in the 1400s, literacy remained a skillset for the elite and powerful and not a tool for the masses (Kallus & Ratliff, 2011). Only the past few centuries have borne witness to the idea of literacy belonging to the people and not the cultured few. However, as more and more experienced the joy of reading, more and more also faced the issues of struggling with literacy.

### **Timeline of Remedial Education**

Some scholars debate which American university deserves the title of the first university founded in the United States, although most agree that it is either Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, or the College of William and Mary (Thelin, 2011). Less

clear, however, is the first developmental class in the American educational system. In 1874, Harvard instituted a remedial English course for freshmen due to faculty complaints that too many students were unprepared for formal writing (Rose, 1985). Harvard was not alone in this issue. Brier (1984) claims that addressing the needs of those underprepared to attend college has always been the responsibility of higher education.

A significant component of the issue with underprepared students attending college rests with the often informal nature of secondary education in 19<sup>th</sup> century America (Wyatt, 1992). Some of these early colleges would admit any student, regardless of academic preparation. Then as well as now, some universities adjusted their standards to admit underprepared students. In response, the universities established preparatory departments to quickly acclimate students to the rigor of college-level work.

In 1889, James Hulme Canfield wrote that “of nearly four hundred institutions of higher learning in the United States, only sixty-five have freed themselves from the embarrassment of a preparatory department” (p. 5). This language allows for no ambiguity; the need for remediation was an embarrassment. Despite this, remedial education has never vacated the higher educational realm.

By the 1940s, most students taking remedial education classes were placed in them due to academic risk. Ohio State University utilized a weekly reading course for those students who tested in the bottom quartile of a standardized college entrance exam (Arendale, 2011). As college enrollment grew, developmental education grew with it (Arendale, 2002). Such remedial reading courses were not an isolated occurrence.

As a result of the GI Bill in 1944, an influx of underprepared veterans enrolled in college (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). The GI Bill, expected to be of little interest and attract roughly eight to ten percent of veterans, instead resulted in over sixteen percent of the eligible population, more than two million individuals, enrolling in college (Thelin, 2011). Many of these veterans were enrolled in remedial education classes, some of which were created specifically for this population (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Bannier, 2006). Higher education never experienced a time when remediation was not needed.

In 1966, Maxwell called for some changes in the field of reading remediation. She acknowledged that most college professors are content-area experts, not teachers, and that the continuing need for reading remediation had to be addressed and improved. Some of the criteria that Maxwell requested in the creation of an effective reading course remains viewed as within the realm of best practices today. Those teaching reading remediation courses should be trained in the field of education; the course should be worth three academic credits and include extensive, practical reading (Maxwell, 1966; Grabe, 2004). Of course, these best practices are not always utilized (Long & Boatman, 2013). Some reading remediation courses do not prepare students as adequately as others.

In the 1970s, open admission policies were in place in many public universities, with the result that the number of students in need of remediation increased (Perin, 2013). By the 1980s, remedial reading courses acquired a skills-based approach in their function (Pearson, 2011). In the 90s, the numbers of students in need of reading remediation were steadily increasing with no change predicted in the immediate future (Ignash, 1997). Part of this problem may have resulted from the issues with the structure of the typical

remediation classroom. Research has shown that strategies rather than skills are a better approach for reading instruction (Afflerbach et al., 2008). Even into the 2000s, the effectiveness of remedial courses varied, depending upon a variety of factors including instructional structure (Bettinger et al., 2013). More regrettably than this, the number of students benefitting from reading remediation declined possibly due to the lack of best practices in the classroom.

Some colleges also utilized non-credentialed instructors in developmental education classes (Fain, 2014). A recent report indicates that more than half of developmental courses today are taught by faculty members who are not credentialed in the field of their developmental course. Still other colleges offer these instructors no professional development (MDRC, 2013). Despite these instructors potentially possessing the desire to help students, they are frequently not equipped by their university, whether with credentialing, professional development, or other supports, to adequately teach their students.

### **Developmental versus Remedial**

The name of the reading class for those who need extra practice has long been a sore point for many in academia. In 1938, Harvard changed the name of their remedial reading course from Remedial Reading to the Reading Class and immediately experienced an increase in enrollment (Wyatt, 1992). Although a difference exists between remedial education and developmental education, many universities have started using the phrase developmental education for both (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002). Myriad researchers use the terms interchangeably (Calcagno & Long, 2008; Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999;



Bailey, 2008; Stuart, 2009; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). With this trend already established, the present study will follow suit.

### **Deficiencies of Remedial Education**

Neither the need for developmental reading nor the issues surrounding its perception are new to the American higher education classroom. Wyatt (1992) reports that in 1889, only roughly 16 percent of colleges did not offer a preparatory department for underprepared students. Students were not just attending with a deficiency in a needed skillset; these students were often reluctantly taking the remedial reading courses, despite needing the experiences from the course to be successful. Almost 50 percent of students attending community college and nearly 20 percent of students attending four-year universities require some form of remedial education (Complete College America, 2012). Unfortunately, participation in remedial education classes does not equal automatic success.

### **Need for an Intervention**

Cox, Friesner, and Khayum (2003) state that there are, minimally, three factors necessary for an underprepared reader to be successful in college. The first is for such a student to be enrolled in a developmental reading course. A developmental reading course allows underprepared and under-practiced students to minimize the differential between what is expected of them in college and what they need to be practiced in performing. The second is that these students actually gain reading improvement and authentic reading practice within the developmental reading course. While this seems like an obvious mandate, there are many such courses that operate solely with students completing workbooks and generate little to no improvement in these students' reading

skills (Hern & Snell, 2010). Lastly, these students must be both prepared and equipped to continue improving their reading comprehension skills via content courses in other academic areas (Cox et al., 2003). Reading at the collegiate level is not a skillset that should be learned or utilized in isolation. Without proper context, the reading skillset is a tool that students may ultimately choose not to utilize – or fail to understand how to properly utilize. Many researchers also recommend curricular integration, the teaching of reading or writing skills within the context of another academic content area (Pearson, Moje, & Greenleaf, 2010; Perin, 2001). This integration would provide the context the reading skillset requires.

One reason for the increasing number of students in need of remediation or an academic intervention is the growing rate of college acceptance (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Some universities have found it in their best interest to stop enrolling students who would require a remedial course, but the majority of universities and colleges in the United States have not taken this approach.

As most colleges in their present form of operation do seem to be more invested in enrollment than being more academically selective with admissions, at least at the outset, interventions are necessary. Higher education administrators have made proposals to increase the productivity of academic interventions, including that of “making remediation a comprehensive program” (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000, p. 82). This process involves proper placement and evaluation upon enrollment; clearly defined curriculum for any remediation or intervention program; intrusive advising and other academic support programs for students; and ongoing evaluation. Programs need to be reviewed for effectiveness, students’ growth needs to be determined by normal assessments, and

tracking of students should be done to determine correlations between the interventions and retention to graduation.

Some criticisms of remedial education question whether such courses are truly preparing students for their collegiate careers after remediation is complete (Brothen & Wambach, 2004). Given that many students leave with no college credit or otherwise fail before completing their degrees, this is a valid complaint. Merely earning college credit can be a milestone for students that can help ensure their graduation, a claim that non-credit remedial courses cannot offer (Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, & Jenkins, 2007). This does nothing to address the actual course content; it is merely indicative that students want to feel that they are making genuine progress toward their goal of graduation, and without college credit, many students do not feel this progress is occurring.

Brothen and Wambach (2004) emphasize the importance of students' needs to take college-level courses that align with their academic goals. Students should receive challenging course material, and they must learn skills that they feel will be important to their future academic challenges (Wambach, Brothen, & Dikel, 2000; McCarthy & Kuh, 2006). Many remediation courses fail to offer this component, with even those students who complete the remediation course still unprepared for the academic rigors of college.

Lei et al. (2010) mentioned several reasons given by students for a lack of compliance in completing reading assignments. These reasons include "lack of reading comprehension skills, lack of self-confidence, disinterest in the course," and "underestimation of reading importance" (p. 228). Perhaps most surprisingly, however, are the instructors' given reasons for not encouraging students to read. Some were expected, such as "the remedial level of students, motivational level of students," and

“motivational level of instructors” (p. 228). The most troubling was that some instructors are not assigning or reinforcing reading with students due to the “possibility of offending students” (p. 228). As Lei et al. posit, these instructors understand that reading is essential for academic comprehension and success but place their own needs and comfort levels higher than that of their students’ academic progress. A variety of interventions in reading education is clearly warranted. Phillips and Phillips (2007) also provide evidence that suggest under-practiced readers engage in a different approach to reading assignments than practiced readers. While stronger readers will read to engage with the text and achieve optimal understanding, weaker readers are more prone to defer reading whenever possible and simply quit reading when the text becomes too difficult. With these myriad text-related issues, both instructors and students have clear-cut roles they need to play for students to understand the text.

Students have reported that they frequently fail to understand the importance of reading as it relates to completing class assignments (Brost & Bradley, 2006). Students even stated that they “did not view reading as important” to understanding learning the material (p. 106). The research is clear that students who read perform better academically than students who do not (Lei et al., 2010). However, students do not necessarily see this connection between assigned reading and understanding the class material. In one study, students even reported that they felt they would learn less in a class that contained required readings (Marek & Christopher, 2011). This does not bode well for instructors who include mandatory reading assignments in their curriculums.

Multiple studies confirm that student compliance with class reading assignments has been declining (Burchfield & Sappington, 2000; Hoeft, 2012). The regrettable

impact of this decline in reading compliance is not even that the individual student who fails to read is negatively impacted; it can have an undeniably significant impact on the entire class. Even those students who do read will experience a less robust experience as the social dynamic of the classroom is changed with a large proportion of those who did not read. When students come to class having read the assigned texts, they are more equipped to engage in classroom discussions which can produce a stronger educational experience for all involved. However, this is also highly dependent upon the instructor enforcing, supporting, and validating the reading expectations of the class. Witnessing a professor failing to monitor reading compliance sends the message that reading is not crucial in that class.

There are other non-print based issues that may indicate the need a student has for an intervention. In the ideal college classroom, students need to interact with both their peers and their instructors to engage in the learning process (Hazard & Nadeau, 2006). Prepared college students are ready to engage with individuals who will help to expand their knowledge base and even challenge preconceived notions. Even more important than this willingness for engagement is the need for the student to be open and receptive to these academic requirements.

One serious need that colleges are facing is the financial impacts of retaining students. Colleges ultimately cannot control if students are prepared for college upon arrival, but regardless, they are responsible for students' retention. A student who is not retained until graduation is a significant financial loss for a university (Codjoe & Helms, 2005). This can quickly become a financial quagmire, as those students who are lost cost the university money that is no longer available to attract qualified faculty to help keep

students retained. Of course, this can also be viewed in the other direction, in that qualified faculty teaching literacy intervention courses can ultimately subsidize their own salaries by the number of students they help retain.

Codjoe and Helm's (2005) financial study also deliberately stated that the need for improved retention falls squarely upon the faculty body, not the student body. At Dalton State College, those instructors who most closely work with at-risk students in need of developmental courses received intensive training before working with said at-risk population. The implication is clear. The students most in need of remedial education need a specially trained and equipped faculty to assist them.

### **Perception of Intervention Courses**

An academic intervention typically occurs with a concern in deficiency of some academic skill (Noelle & Gansle, 2014). An intervention course is a course designed to target this academic concern. There are similarities between intervention courses and remedial courses. Both are typically suggested or mandated due to this noted deficiency, whether identified by test scores or teacher observation. One significant contrast between the two is that remedial is often perceived as a decrease in rigor to meet students where they are, whereas intervention coursework is accelerated. Furthermore, these accelerated interventions produced greater academic outcomes than the traditional remedial model (Edgecombe, 2011).

One persistent issue with the traditional remedial model is that the courses typically do not count toward graduation (Long & Boatman, 2013). Tuition costs for the course are typically the same as for standard credit-bearing courses. Because of this credit deficiency in the traditional model, some states have instituted guidelines for the

maximum number of remedial coursework that students may take (State of Maine, 2012; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2008). The very definition of remedial education is to provide students with the education needed for them to enter a credit-bearing academic program (ECS, 2012). Remedial education classes do not offer credit toward graduation, unlike freshman-level courses in all other departments.

Despite their proliferation on university and community college campuses, remedial and developmental education courses are typically perceived as too insufficient in scope to offer any significant impact on student success or retention (Grimes, 1997). A case could be argued that the differences in the population of students involved in developmental or remedial coursework as opposed to those enrolled in credit-bearing courses could be the reason for this lack of effectiveness. However, even when controlling for student background, merely being enrolled in remedial education has a negative impact on student retention (Bettinger & Long, 2004). A recent study indicated that students enrolled in multiple non-credit-bearing developmental classes suffer from decreased academic self-concept as compared to other members of their cohort not in such classes (Martin, Goldwasser, & Harris, 2015). This stigma in part is due to college students' self-perception of themselves as poor students, a label frequently self-assigned upon placement in a remedial or developmental course (Basic Skills Agency, 1997). Due to these issues, remedial education is frequently viewed as a poor substitute for credit-bearing courses.

Nationally, with only seventeen percent of those students who enroll in remedial reading earning a bachelor's degree, compared to almost sixty percent for those who do not require in remedial education, there is a clear need for an improvement in the success

of remedial and developmental education (NCSL, 2016). There is also an undeniable stigma attached to the terms remedial and developmental, a stigma confounded by the two words frequently and incorrectly being used interchangeably. Developmental education as a buzzword has replaced the phrase remedial education in an attempt to remove some of the stigma (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002). However, rather than achieve success in this attempt, the phrase developmental has grown a stigma of its own.

This negative perception of developmental education can also be attributed to a cycle of blame (Dillon, 2009). Colleges blame high schools sending them unprepared students; high school blames middle schools for sending them unprepared students. There are many underperforming public schools where the expectations for what students will need to know in college are not properly addressed, resulting in students who then must enroll in coursework that they view as merely a financial obligation with no tangible reward.

A report released by ACT also revealed multiple non-academic factors that can impact student retention (Lotkowski et al., 2004). These factors included academic self-confidence, general self-concept, and social support, all of which are shown to be negatively impacted by merely being placed in a remedial course. Academic self-confidence in particular was labeled as a strong predictor of student retention. Until the stigma of remedial education is reduced or eliminated, this will continue to be a problem. Non-credit-bearing remedial courses have been commonplace at American universities since the 1980s (Wyatt, 1992). There is little doubt that an intervention program is needed, but the benefits of remedial education have thus far not been proven to have a



strong enough impact to warrant its continued operation without significant modifications.

Some modifications have been attempted in the typical structure of the remedial or developmental course. Perin (2005) described a course that was very similar in structure to the standard remedial framework yet was attached with a supplemental course so as to ensure students would receive college credit. The success of this intervention was not reported, although a report from Bailey and Karp (2003) indicate that the inclusion of college credit in a remedial course could significantly impact student success. Perin (2005) also indicates that one key element in crafting a successful, credit-bearing developmental course would be data-tracking, continual refinement, and necessary modification to ensure that the course meets changing student needs.

Under-practiced and underprepared students who need a developmental reading course may view such a course as an experience that offers nothing positive for them (Conley, 2007). This negative view could lead to students dropping out during their freshmen year. Ultimately, the image of a literacy intervention course as a developmental or remedial education class has a stigma. This stigma is also often not realized until one has enrolled in college. These students frequently have “less awareness of what it takes to fit in and to cope with the system” (Conley, 2007, p. 24). The negative perception that quickly grows during the literacy intervention course could, without careful framing by the instructors and the university itself, result in students merely leaving the post-secondary educational system rather than adapting to it.

There have been some suggestions for how to benefit students without removing developmental education. A sense of community in the classroom is one powerful

method by which instructors can help to minimize the stigma of a remedial reading course and help enhance the educational experience of the student participants (Kuh, 2007). Something as simple to implement as classroom discussions can have a profound effect on improving both students' attitudes and performance in the classroom.

### **International Student Perspectives on Literacy intervention**

International students who come to America to receive a degree in higher education often face a difficult trial that domestic students never encounter. While higher education is a challenging and difficult path for most students, for those who are pursuing higher education in a non-native language, the struggles are even greater. The literacy levels of international students are a continuing concern for those who work in post-secondary institutions. While these students are often tremendously bright and highly capable, the hurdles of reading and writing in a language that is not their native tongue adds considerable stress and difficulty to what is already a difficult process. While student success for international students in higher education has been studied, there is a scarcity of research on topics of literacy as it relates to international students in higher education.

**International students and language difficulties.** Sawir (2005) did a study on the language difficulties of international students in Australia due to the troubles Asian non-native English speakers experienced in the classroom. Many of these Asian students, attending university in an English-speaking country, experienced problems, frequently with oral fluency as opposed to written fluency. This language impasse resulted in learning difficulties for these international students. The data that Sawir (2005) reported in this study were obtained from an earlier study of English as Foreign Language (EFL)

learners. Data for this study were collected from interviews conducted with twelve international students from five Asian countries: Indonesia, China (specifically Hong Kong), Thailand, Vietnam, and Japan. All twelve students were pursuing education in Australia and continuing their studies in English, a non-native language for them. The students were asked questions on various aspects of English language instruction, including classroom practices, resources that allowed the practical usage of English language, and any difficulties they experienced in this language acquisition. They were also asked questions about their experience as international students in Australia.

The interviews provided information on their prior English instructional experiences and difficulties experienced in their university studies (Sawir, 2005). Students revealed that there was a much greater focus on the grammar and mechanics of the English language than in developing conversational fluency. Some students reported problems in discerning the accents of their teachers, with several stating they could learn to discern the accent of their initial English instructor but were developing no skills that would allow them to transfer that skill to a new accent or speaking pattern. Additionally, they reported a marked lack of opportunities to practice in non-classroom settings. The student interviews revealed that the prior experience a student had in English was a strong predictor of his abilities to cope with the stressors of being a non-native speaking student at an English-speaking university. Despite the fact that some students were successful, all twelve students reported that they had not had sufficient exposure to the English language prior to beginning their English-language university schooling. Their prior schooling in the EFL program had given them a strong base in one-way, written communication, but they had very little academic or informal practice in conversational

English. In addition, students believed, prior to enrolling in the post-secondary institution, that grammar and structure would be the most important aspects of success in non-native schooling. This belief resulted in delayed oral fluency for the international students.

**Literacy needs of international students.** Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2009) studied the problems international students encountered at the University of Toledo to assist with identifying said problems and providing recommendations at the university level to accommodate international student needs. The authors hypothesized that while English language proficiency is obviously needed and expected, many students face shortcomings in that their preparation before coming to the university was in reading proficiency and not necessarily conversational proficiency.

Utilizing information obtained from a broad-based literature review, all data were collected via an online survey provided to two-thirds of the international students, a number exceeding 1100, at the University of Toledo, with 121 students ultimately completing the survey (Sherry et al., 2009). It was not sent to more students due to a lack of current email addresses for all students. The authors used qualitative research methods for this study. As the survey responses were both open- and closed-ended, they were able to successfully collect data in the participants' own words. Further, no identifying information was collected, ensuring anonymity.

The authors reported that many of their findings aligned with the existing literature on this topic (Sherry et al., 2009). Literacy difficulties, cultural acclimation problems, and social supports were consistently reported throughout. Although no numerical data were reported, many participants stated that the language needs of the

international student population could be better supported. However, most emphasized issues with spoken language over written language difficulties. A few students specifically mentioned difficulties with English slang, wishing there was an opportunity for them to improve this specific area of weakness. Several students expressed a desire to see their university offer more language workshops, both formal and informal, to assist with their literacy shortcomings. It is important to note that this university has a writing center which was highly praised by the majority of the respondents. Tangentially related to literacy, some students stated they had difficulty adapting to American cultural norms. While almost 65% of those responding reported no problems, 17.6% reported a few problems and 16.7% stated they had difficulties. However, when asked if they felt their own culture was understood by American students, more than 60% of the respondents felt they were not understood or “understood a little” (Sherry et al., 2009, p. 39). The majority of the respondents stated that they had formed friendships at the university, although 50% of the students indicated their friendships were exclusively with international students. Approximately 8% reported that they had made no friends at all in the university or the community. In a similar vein, 48.6% of the respondents felt included in the local community, 4.6% answered somewhat, 44.0% answered no, and 2.8% reported that they didn’t know. When answering a question about difficulties with the university community, 56.0% said that they had experienced difficulties and 44.0% had not, with some of these students reporting their difficulties with the university community specifically related to intense homesickness. The authors also stated that many international students felt their social and cultural issues still stemmed from literacy problems.

Plagiarism is also a recurrent issue with international students at a greater degree than domestic students when it comes to literacy intervention coursework. One unfortunate consequence of students who are struggling with literacy is that for those who do not speak English natively it is tremendously easier to engage in “textual weaving,” rather than attempt the admittedly more difficult task of internalizing the requisite information and delivering it in their own, properly attributed style (Abasi & Graves, 2008, p. 226). Papers may be full of direct quotes, sometimes even properly attributed. International students will sometimes cull information from a variety of sources in an attempt to craft their own argument, but they may do so in a haphazard, piecemeal fashion. Ultimately, international students, when allowed to connect readings and writing assignment to their own life experiences, have a greater understanding of the writing process for the English language and in academia.

### **Best Practices of Literacy Intervention**

An intervention is only successful if it elicits the change in participants that will result in their success. It is not sufficient to merely take a literacy intervention course; it is crucial that students benefit from the course, and even more importantly, that the course is structured in such a way that all students have the opportunity to improve their educational standing. A literacy intervention course that has students only completing workbooks could still result in those students passing the course but learning no new skills or strategies that could be transferred to the remainder of their academic career. There are a variety of changes that those in charge of almost any developmental course could make that would create a positive impact in students. For college students, retention and matriculating to graduation is the ultimate success. All forward motion

from universities should be in terms of providing opportunities for students to recognize their need for positive change and in being proactive as their own advocates for that change. For those who want students to succeed and achieve, there is research that shows the best way to structure a literacy intervention course.

### **Non-Academic Needs of Those Needing Intervention**

Obviously, reading and writing interventions are key components of successful literacy intervention courses. However, other aspects of student performance, success, and achievement are addressed by the faculty members who teach such courses. Significant research exists in the literature which emphasizes the need and importance of curricular competencies addressing topics and practices that are ultimately non-academic. Retention and persistence, both key, non-academic components of a successful literacy intervention course, are addressed as they ultimately impact the entire academic success and future of each student.

**Tinto's theory of integration.** Myriad reasons exist for reasons that a student may persist to graduation or leave without a degree; the reasons for such behavior are frequently unclear, with each individual student possessing unique individual reasons for leaving. Vincent Tinto (1988) has a theory of integration which can provide some clarity into some of the reasons for student departure.

An especially trying aspect for some students in staying in college are personal difficulties, such as changing from one membership group to another. Most college students are either enrolling in college from high school or the workforce at a nontraditional age, but this is still a profound change in environments. The disconnect

that some students experience in transitioning environments is one that students frequently are ill-equipped to handle.

Tinto's (1988) theory of integration is one lens through which student difficulty in college can be viewed. The first component of his theory is the stage of separation. For those students who are new to the college environment, they must immediately make a separation from memberships they have held in previous communities. Any student who experiences difficulty with this membership separation is more likely to be retained until graduation. Tinto himself points out that there are significant limitations with this component of his theory of integration, as students who commute or are not forced to separate from past communities for a variety of reasons will not necessarily experience this stage of separation. Regardless, there are clear strengths for students who share in the membership of those physically united together on a college campus. Students who do need to separate but experience difficulties doing so may have problems connecting with their new college campus environment.

Related to this first phase is the second stage of Tinto's (1988) theory which posits that a transition to college is requisite for those joining a college campus. Whether the membership of the past is with a high school, one's hometown, or a workforce, when it is replaced with new membership in college, the college student must also move away from previous associations and lifestyles and move into new patterns and rhythms in their new membership as a student in the college community. This can be especially difficult for some students, as they are giving up a known existence and transition into a membership that they did not expect or, in some cases, even desire. For the student who



experiences difficulties with this, they are more likely to withdraw from the college environment.

When the previous two phases have been completed, Tinto's (1988) theory of integration holds that the student will become integrated into the college community. With the separation from past environments complete, the student transitions into the new one. At this point, he or she has the ambitious task of deciphering and acclimating to societal norms and behaviors that are expected in the new environment. Failure to complete this step of integration can, like the previous two before it, result in withdrawal from college.

For successful persistence in college, a student must complete two differing types of integration. Academic integration is the primary one. Numerous college students are fully capable of adapting to the social aspect of college, fitting in quite readily with the socialization and abandoning the past environment. However, without academic integration, failure is still inevitable. Myriad freshmen have come to college for exactly one semester, failed out, and returned home.

However, while some students readily fit in with the social integration, the second type, there are still some who struggle. There are certainly students who can manage to navigate college without social support, social integrations are both necessary and sought by most college students (Tinto, 1988). This social integration can manifest in many ways. Students may simply make friends; find social support through clubs or organizations; forge fulfilling relationships with faculty members, instructors, and advisors; or any number of other methods through which a student can fend off feelings of isolation.

**Keys to retention and persistence.** A great deal of the research conducted on retention in higher education has focused on retention and persistence. Some of the predictors of retention and persistence cover a wide gamut of possibilities, including unique-to-the-student factors such as class performance, which has been found to be positively correlated with retention and persistence (Cochran et al., 2014). Other researchers have found that a strong sense of self-discipline can result in higher academic achievement in young adults (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). DeBerard et al. (2004) imply that predictors such as student demographic, prior academic records, smoking drinking, social support, coping skills, and general health have no significant impact on retention. This latter study did concede that academic performance in one's first year of college is one of the strongest retention and persistence predictors.

Akin to the social integration aspect of Tinto's theory, some researchers found that the external events in a student's life during their time in higher education can have an effect on persistence and retention (Christie & Dinham, 1991). Those students who reported taking part in non-academic activities in college and having friendship were likelier to persist than others.

There are also psychosocial factors which have been found to be positively correlated with persistence in a population of community college students (Napoli & Wortman, 1998). Conscientiousness, social support, psychological well-being, and self-esteem were all found to have a positive impact on student retention. Napoli and Wortman's study implied that, although there is a positive correlation, causality was not necessarily found. However, when combined with Tinto's theories of social integration,

those same elements that could lead to a student being socially integrated could also lead to a student internalizing such positive psychosocial factors.

In addition, retention can be affected by how well a student deals with social adjustment in higher education. One six-year longitudinal study found that students who reported greater levels of social adjustment during their time in college were more likely to persist than their non-socially adjusted classmates (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Clearly, social integration can be profound on student persistence.

**Self-efficacy and other intrinsic qualities.** Self-efficacy is another significant predictor for student success (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2004; Cukras, 2006). In Chemers et al.'s study, a student who can demonstrate both academic self-efficacy and has an innate sense of optimism displays greater performance in the classroom and a sense of adjustment in the self. While optimism cannot easily be taught, the researchers posit that the implementation and "maintenance of positive self-perceptions and beliefs, particularly academic self-efficacy" should continue into the post-secondary environment (Chemers et al., 2004, p. 63). Much as with reading fluency, for those students who do not adequately possess the intrinsic qualities that lead to success, these skills can be taught and supported.

Despite the wealth of research on persistence in higher education, especially when viewed through the lens of Tinto's theory of individual departure, there is still a great deal to be studied. Tinto (1987) himself stated that new technologies and educational innovations are one potentially powerful source of new knowledge and research. The internet has been studied as a retention tool when it comes to academic integration, but little has been studied on the role it could have with social integration (Cochran et al.,

2014). The internet, social media, and the new digital age could be a great tool for increased retention, especially given the role it could play in both academic and social integration.

Confidence and motivation, clearly intrinsic qualities, can also play a key role in student academic success (Yip, 2009). The student who wishes to learn, strives to be successful, and is highly motivated has better academic results than students who do not possess these qualities. Merriam (2004) proposes that one of the criteria required for a student to achieve this level of transformational learning is simply the desire to achieve such a level of transformational learning. Furthermore, the improvement in academic success is largely based upon the fact that students who possess these virtues are more inclined to expend time and effort upon their studying, but the end result is the same. High motivation and drive are predictors of academic success.

### **Research-based Practices within a Literacy Intervention Course**

In the 2009 regular session of the Kentucky General Assembly, Senate Bill 1 was introduced. Section 21 of the bill (Senate Bill 1 Highlights, 2009) directs the Council for Post-Secondary Education, the Kentucky Board of Education, and the Kentucky Department of Education to mandate that colleges and universities reduce the rates of college remediation by fifty percent by the year 2014 and increase the graduation rate of students needing at least one remedial course by three percent for each year from 2009 to 2014. The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks state that students who meet the benchmark levels for each area, set by ACT, have a 50% chance of earning a B in a related credit-bearing course (ACT, 2006). ACT initially set the benchmark for reading at 21 for the ACT reading test, with the implication that those earning 20 or lower on the

ACT were at risk of academic failure. Kentucky further redefined the benchmark for reading by lowering the definition of being college-ready in reading to a score of 20, meaning students scoring 19 or below would receive some type of reading assistance. ACT's benchmark for college readiness was changed in 2013 to a reading score of 22, indicating students 21 or below would need reading assistance – although not necessarily remedial coursework (ACT, 2013). Traditionally, students who scored 17 or below were required to take a developmental reading course. These new regulations mandated the need for a reading intervention for students scoring 18-19 on the reading portion of the ACT. Each state university in Kentucky had to submit a plan for intervention they proposed and then upon approval from the governing state agencies, implement the plan, and report back to the state as required.

Universities had to take many considerations into account as they began to develop the newly mandated reading interventions. ACT (2006) offered several suggested strategies and activities that they theorized would be helpful in increasing college readiness in reading. Among these strategies was to incorporate more complex reading materials at the high school level, revise state standards to “explicitly define reading expectations across the high school curriculum,” increase targeted interventions for students who are behind in reading, and support high school teachers in implementing these changes (ACT, 2006, p. 23). These changes, however, do nothing to address those students who still come to college unprepared for the rigors of reading at the collegiate-level.

In addition to university-wide mandates in improving the success of remediation students, faculty who teach a literacy intervention course also play a key role in student

success. While there is a small interaction effect with the role faculty can produce in student self-perception, a stronger link has been identified in regards to student academic performance (Woodside, Wong, & Weist, 1999). Both verbal and nonverbal actions from the instructor can have a positive impact on student success, including the students' perception of his or her success. However, students also identify their own academic achievement as a correlating factor in their perceived self-concept (House, 1993). For some students, their academic successes or failures have a significant impact on their perception of themselves as students and individuals. Tinto (1987) stated that faculty-student interactions both inside of class and in informal outside-class settings can have a marked impact on the academic achievement of students. The myriad interactions between faculty members and their students can impact the academic achievement of students.

Some research has shown the importance that social media and other technology-based forms of interaction have in the traditional face-to-face classrooms (Bowers-Campbell, 2008; Abe & Jordan, 2013). Using social media in instruction results in students developing a greater self-efficacy, in no small part due to the ease with which students can communicate with their instructors. It can also result in students feeling more supported, accepted, and involved in their entire educational experience.

Chung (2001) states that courses developed to help support and grow student reading should be theory-based, although he also concedes that the theory upon which a reading course is built can vary depending upon the situation. Chung describes three particular theories, all of which have been utilized to varying levels of success in reading courses. The model-based approach to reading theory is a method whereby the

instructors teach with models that approximate real-world applications. In the reading classroom, this may appear in a wide variety of andragogical practices, as by its very definition of approximating applications, it can appear in a different form under different instructors and at different institutions. The contextualist approach to reading theory, meanwhile, borrows from a variety of social science fields and implies that each student has a unique perspective and a valid yet different approach to learning. While it is undeniable that all students are different, this theory fails when faced with the prospect of a central theory for effective developmental reading instruction. The classical approach to reading theory holds that, much like theories in sciences, best practices that have been tested and shown to be effective should be utilized. While Chung (2001) agrees that this seems like an obvious conclusion, it is often not found in practice. There are best practices of literacy intervention that must be considered and adhered to for an appropriate and successful literacy intervention course.

Surprisingly, many reading courses, both intervention and traditional remedial, do not teach critical reading skills (Bosley, 2008). The department on most college campuses where any type of reading instruction takes place is typically the English department, yet even there, most instructors and professors view reading as a skill that students should already possess (Helmets, 2003). The development, practice, and implementation of critical reading skills is severe underutilized on most college campuses, with many teaching this skillset tangentially to course content (Bosley, 2008). For the student who is underprepared and under-practiced in critical reading, a more targeted approach to instruction is warranted.

In addition, some universities have found success with courses designed for the underprepared population by implementing strategies within the course that teach self-regulated learning strategies for students (Bail, Zhang, & Tachiyama, 2008). The clear implication is that it is not the content of the course that can have such a pronounced impact upon students' retention, academic success, and graduation rate, but the structure and intent of the course, its objective, and its practice in the classroom that benefit students. Additionally, students who are enrolled in classes taught by instructors who monitor and assess students' needs, build a community learning environment, and relate the reading materials to each student's unique experiences achieve more success than students who do not experience such personalization (Miglietti & Strange, 1998). The instructor obviously carries a tremendously powerful role in the success of a literacy intervention course.

Akin to this are research findings that indicate when literacy intervention courses either provide unique content or are linked with other content coursework, these underprepared students experience a greater level of academic success and self-efficacy than students who take a developmental reading course that stands in isolation (Caverly, Nicholson, & Radcliffe, 2004). After all, the literacy intervention course is designed not to be an obstacle to graduation but instead to be an opportunity for students to learn and practice new skills and strategies in a variety of academic settings.

There is a marked difference between students who are incapable of success in higher education and those who are simply unprepared for higher education (Maloney, 2003). Best practices can be utilized in the creation of a literacy intervention course to best support students who need such an intervention. One of the most important



distinctions that a successful literacy intervention course will use is the implantation of primary sources as text. Workbooks, an all-too-familiar component of many developmental reading programs, are commonly used but with questionable impact. Using actual textbooks with legitimate activities to supplement said textbooks result in a better prepared student (Surdin, 2009). Isolating skills, such as with workbook or practice that does not exist in other classroom settings, may be doing a grand disservice to students.

Students are ultimately more successful if they learn transferable skills. An authentic task, one that can be replicated for a real-world purpose in a real-world environment, have largely taken a backseat to the standard lecture format of many college classes (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). When academic skills are used in a way that emulates how it will be used in a real-world setting, students demonstrate greater mastery.

Much of the common best practices in literacy instruction are tied directly into the means by which children and adolescents need to be exposed to reading, writing, speaking, and listening. While pedagogy, the methods and practices of teaching to children, has largely become a theoretical concept that is frequently extended to all ages, andragogy, the methods and practices of teaching to adults, is the source from which effective instructional methods of a literacy intervention should arise.

There are some similarities between the pedagogy and andragogy of literacy instruction. However, many adult literacy programs, whether they exist at the university level or community adult education programs, frequently are not delivering the quality instruction that their adult learners need because they are tailored using techniques that

would work with children (Newton, 1977). Over the last several decades, the science of andragogy has made significant improvement in the manners, methods, and practices with which educators teach adults.

Some researchers suggest that adult's educational experiences should arise from experiences unique to adult lives (Jarvis, 2012). New educational experiences for adults can be assimilated by adults via their existing experiential knowledge; the processes by which a teacher would teach a child with limited experience can be vastly different from the process of teaching an adult with more world knowledge. This also dovetails with the strength of utilizing authentic experiences in the classroom; not only are the skills and strategies of the adult classroom built upon existing knowledge, andragogical best practices hold that they should also be authentic and replicable in real-world settings, even if those other real-world settings are other classrooms.

In a sharp contrast to the typical workbook-driven model of developmental reading, best practices of literacy intervention course design results in a different class structure. Considerable course seat time should be used for an open, round-table discussion format of the authentic texts used in the course. This open format allows for a wide variety of teachable moments for adults, including reading, writing, speaking, listening, debates, and instruction. By using authentic reading experiences with real literature, adult learners can more easily find an application for improving their literacy skills (Raphael & McMahon, 1994). This also gives students practice in engaging in academic discourse, a skillset that all adult learners need as they progress through their post-secondary academic career (Mezirow, 1997). This skillset learned from academic

discourse serves multiple purposes, all of which are skills that will come into play over the course of the learners' higher education career.

Remaining seat time should be devoted to practice of reading and writing, as well as some assessments. At its most basic, there is a clear distinction between reading skills and reading strategies. Reading skills are associated with the “proficiency of a complex act” and reading strategies are a “conscious and systematic plan” (Afflerbach et al., 2008, p. 365). A skill-based reading curriculum also incorporates part-to-whole instruction, which holds that students who learn the smaller components of the reading process will ultimately become a proficient reader. Researchers indicate that a strategy-based approach utilizing whole-to-part reading is a more effective method of developing proficient literacy skills (Goodman & Goodman, 2009). Whole-to-part reading is the usage of starting with challenging texts and scaffolding readers with support as they become progressively stronger with complex print (Goodman & Goodman, 1990; Westbrook, 2013). With these types of strategies and practice, students, regardless of age, can progress from effort to automaticity (Scorza et al., 2015; Afflerbach et al., 2008). Automaticity, the “automatic use of specific actions while reading occurs at many levels – decoding, fluency, comprehension, and critical reading,” is a vital step in literacy fluency (Afflerbach et al., 2008, p. 368). Without automaticity, students will continue to struggle with literacy. Purposeful, authentic reading strategies can enhance students' literacy skills that they can then carry over into their other college courses, an authentic, real-world utilization of these literacy skills.

Another best practice that should be utilized with a reading course is to provide reading assignments that are graded and returned with extensive teacher comments

(Ryan, 2006). These comments can occur in a variety of manners, but ultimately, it is teacher feedback that truly drives a successful literacy intervention. Students need to know both what they are doing well and what they need to improve upon. This cannot be accomplished with a workbook activity or an absent teacher. It requires diligence on the part of both the student and the instructor.

### **Auxiliary Supports for Literacy Students**

Tinto (2005) makes the claim that the institution who admits underprepared students is responsible for both ensuring their retention and graduation. There are six conditions required for success: “commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning” (p. 2). These criteria are crucial for retaining and preparing students for their academic careers. By examining the auxiliary supports and best practices for students through the lens of Tinto’s theory of student success, a projection of the possibilities for a successful reading intervention course for students can be crafted.

Commitment from the institution can be found in the formation of an intervention (Tinto, 2005). Most universities are more than willing to pay lip service to this, with catchphrases and slogans emblazoned across campus. However, the institution that is truly committed to student success will invest the resources required to ensure underprepared students are successful. Auxiliary supports for students abound in the developmental reading realm (Perin, 2004). One especially potent support is the establishment of learning assistance centers for the population of students needing remedial services.

Expectations are another key area, and Tinto (2005) believes that most universities expect too little of students during their freshmen year of college. A literacy intervention course built upon best practices should be thoroughly challenging but also useful for the students enrolled. The instructors of such a course also send the message to students that it is both accepted and expected that the students are capable of more rigorous work (Barragan & Cormier, 2013). Having high expectations and holding students to them certainly requires more work from faculty, but it can result in a more successful student.

Support is vital. Research holds that the types of support most needed for this at-risk population are academic, social, and financial support (Tinto, 2005). Every aspect of this support could be met with an immersive plan in place for incoming freshmen. An additional study also indicated that simply offering students reminders and making assignments sound interesting could be one support for students that would increase reading compliance (Hoeft, 2012). Some even maintain that encouraging reading for pleasure could be one powerful aspect of providing support for students (Paulson, 2006). The developmental or intervention reading instructor who could best address the possibility of self-selected pleasure reading within the intervention reading class could find a powerful strategy that can increase academic success. While these are undeniably simplistic support strategies, there is nothing inherently difficult in utilizing them.

### **Conclusion**

As long as there is a financial component to higher education in any form, underprepared and under-practiced students will be a common theme in the college classroom. Clearly, some colleges are addressing these students by prohibiting access

and denying admission. Other schools are attempting to admit these students and swiftly help them achieve the necessary skills for collegiate success.

The present study contains the stories, experiences, and insights of student and faculty stakeholders involved in the creation, delivery, and participation in a literacy intervention course. In viewing the perspectives of developmental education, its perception across time, and the best practices of literacy instruction, these stakeholders' stories may offer a unique perspective on a unique literacy intervention course. The following chapters will detail the methods utilized in this study and the stories of the stakeholders intimately involved with a literacy intervention course.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Developmental education has been the focus of quantitative and qualitative research (Bettinger & Long, 2009; Bachman, 2013; Sawir, 2005; Sherry et al., 2010). Researchers in this field tend to either examine the qualitative aspects of student or instructor experiences in remedial education or they focus exclusively on quantifiable, numerical data, although there are certainly exceptions that marry these two approaches. This study utilizes portraiture for the qualitative data and a combination of Chi square and descriptive statistics for the quantitative data. The presence of quantitative data exists to better support the qualitative stories from faculty and student stakeholders and serves to assist the researcher in finding and crafting the story from all data points.

This chapter describes the role the research questions took in framing this study; the research design of this study; the instrument development process; a description of the population studied and how they were chosen; the procedures for data collection, both qualitative and quantitative; the quantitative and qualitative analyses conducted; the role of the researcher; and ethical considerations of this study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions shaped this study. These questions led to the qualitative methods, coding techniques used, portraiture analysis, and the quantitative statistical coding methods to most appropriately answer these questions about the literacy intervention course and issues of student success. The student and faculty stakeholders of this literacy intervention course of this study shared profound stories and experiences via interview and survey data. Knowledge of the best practices of literacy education were

used to craft questions one and two (Woodside et al., 1999; House, 1993; Tinto, 1987; Chung, 2001; Bower-Campbell, 2008; Abe & Jordan, 2013; Bosley, 2008; Bail et al., 2008; Miglietti & Strange, 1998). Research questions three and four were developed with Mezirow's theory of transformational learning in mind (Clark, 1993). This theory, which states that students who experience a transformational learning event are also themselves transformed as learners, easily reconciles both the stories the student stakeholders share about the literacy intervention course and the academic successes these students experience as a result of the literacy intervention course.

RQ1: What was the theoretical framework on which the literacy intervention course was conceptualized and developed?

RQ2: How did the theoretical framework manifest in the curricular core competencies of the course?

RQ3: What curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course impact student success as identified by stakeholder reporting?

RQ4: What transformational learning experiences do students report as a result of the literacy intervention course?

### **Research Design**

The researcher used the qualitative research approach of portraiture to craft the narrative uncovered in the data. Portraiture is especially useful in portraying the voice and context of stakeholders' stories (Hill, 2005). In addition to voice and context, portraiture's utility became evident in using the emergent themes from the data to more completely construct the shared narrative of all stakeholders (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The "repetitive refrains" and "resonant metaphors" found in the open-



ended data responses were best served with portraiture in a way that few other ethnographic qualitative approaches could approach (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 193-198). The unanticipated stories of stakeholders resulted from the open-ended questions of the stakeholder surveys and interviews (Fowler, 2014). The researcher could not have anticipated the benefit found in these data prior to data collection.

### **Instrument Development**

The researcher wrote several drafts of the survey that ultimately was distributed to the student stakeholders before the final draft was created. The primary researcher wrote the first survey draft based upon the research questions of the study, best practices of literacy instruction, and basic demographic data. The current instructors of the course participated in the first focus group to give feedback on the preliminary survey items. This instructor focus group resulted in the streamlining of the survey, elimination of duplicative items, and the usage of simpler language (Sheatsley, 2013). A meeting with the researcher's committee methodologist resulted in further streamlining, reducing the survey from 38 items to a more swiftly completed 22. Based upon advice from the methodologist, the survey would also be drafted in Qualtrics in such a manner that students could skip answering any questions and still complete the survey.

Current volunteer students of the literacy intervention course participated in three separate focus groups. As the researcher administered the survey only to those who had already completed the literacy intervention course, the most appropriate available sample were students still enrolled in the current semester. The first focus group was to establish clarity in the survey items (Morgan, 1996). The attendance at this first focus group was 34 students. The second and third focus groups consisted of 30 and 36 students

respectively. Students at these last two focus groups completed the entire instrument. Students were timed to attain a rough completion time and were further asked to note any items that were unclear. Their input fashioned the final version of the student survey.

### **Participants**

In the research for this literacy intervention course, interviews with faculty stakeholders and surveys with student stakeholders were used to “draw a picture.” The research questions posed address information that can only be obtained from one population or the other, although the two combined data sources will be useful in constructing the entire narrative.

#### **Faculty Stakeholders**

The researcher interviewed three faculty stakeholders for this study. No names are used for faculty stakeholders to preserve anonymity. One faculty member, who will hereafter be referred to as the course creator, was interviewed separately. The faculty course creator was responsible for the creation of the literacy intervention course and representing the course through the university curricular process.

The other two faculty stakeholders were interviewed together. They will be referred to as Instructor One and Instructor Two to disguise their identities. Both are current instructors for the literacy intervention course. These interviews were also filmed, and information obtained from the video that would not have been apparent in an audio recording may be used in the qualitative analysis. Other individuals are referred to by title rather than name as appropriate in the results. It is also important to note that all faculty stakeholders involved in course creation, implementation, and delivery possess

appropriate credentialing from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to teach advanced reading courses.

### **Student Stakeholders**

Students who had previously taken the literacy intervention course from Fall 2012 to Fall 2015 were given the opportunity to be surveyed. The survey was administered via Qualtrics and students were notified of the survey through their student email. The survey and its development are detailed in the following section. As survey responses were anonymous and answers to one question are not linked to another, pseudonyms for this population are neither needed nor applicable.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were obtained via interviews with faculty stakeholders and a survey for student stakeholders. The faculty stakeholder interviews were semi-structured interviews to allow the researcher to ask related questions as topics worthy of in-depth discussion were discussed. Semi-structured interviews are beneficial in situations where the establishment of rapport is important in eliciting more in-depth responses (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2012). It also allowed for the researcher to seek clarification as needed.

### **Procedures**

Faculty stakeholder interviews were conducted on at the university on a Friday, chosen as none of the faculty members were teaching at that time. The student surveys were administered via Qualtrics, given to students via email. Students were emailed to participate in the survey by the instructor of record for their section of the literacy intervention course. The following email, with personalized greeting and closing from

the instructor of record, was sent to all participants. The literacy intervention course name is redacted for reasons of anonymity.

This is the first of three emails you will receive about this survey.

A [REDACTED] instructor is conducting research on the impact of the course. As you have taken this course in the past, we are interested in what you have to say about [REDACTED].

The survey can be accessed by the link below. It should take you no more than 12 minutes to complete. Your responses will be completely anonymous.

We will also be giving away \$50 gift cards randomly to four participants for participating in this survey. Upon completion of the survey, your browser will immediately redirect you to another survey where you can enter your email address. Your email address is not linked to your responses in any way.

If you have any questions, please contact [NAME REDACTED] at [EMAIL REDACTED].

[SURVEY LINK REDACTED]

This email was sent to all students who have taken the course since Fall 2012 through Fall 2015. Subsequent emails appended the first sentence to say “this is the second of three emails” and “this is the final of three emails.” The initial list consisted of 1,416 students. However, students who are no longer enrolled, whether it is due to dropping out, transferring to another university, or graduation, do not have access to their student email address. The university Institutional Research confirmed that 712 students who enrolled in the literacy intervention course during the Fall 2012 to Fall 2015 time period still had active emails at the university and were able to access the survey.

Multistage sampling was used to identify the population (Fowler, 2014). Emails were obtained from each section of the literacy intervention course via the university's course registration system. The two-stage system first identified each section of the literacy intervention course and second listed each student enrolled. For those students who had taken the course more than once, they were included on the list for the most recent course offering.

### **Analysis**

In the portraiture paradigm, the researcher “draws a picture” from all available data. The stakeholder stories encapsulated within survey and interview responses is ultimately captured in narrative form, bringing meaning from the entirety of the data and order from chaos. The analysis of the data will merge the participant stories and the reader's perspective. This analysis occurred through an in-depth coding of all raw responses with NVivo Pro 11 via text-based node capabilities. As the researcher identified emergent themes, a narrative was crafted that utilized appropriate quantifiable data to further enhance the “portrait” painted.

### **Portraiture Paradigm**

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) introduced the concept of social science portraiture, “a genre of inquiry and representation that seeks to join science and art” to the field of qualitative research (p. xv). The literature on this topic represents both valid criticisms and hearty praise (Muccio, Reybold, & Kidd, 2015; English, 2000; Hackman, 2002; Dixon, Chapman, & Hill, 2005). Among the criticisms is that portraiture relies too heavily on researchers to construct their own narrative (English, 2000). Those heaping praise state that portraiture is “best described as a blending of qualitative

methodologies – life history, naturalist inquiry, and most prominently, that of ethnographic methods” (Dixson et al., 2005, p. 17). At its most basic, portraiture is the effective merging of art and science. The skilled portraitist uses raw data to craft a compelling story that incorporates the context in which data is produced, the voice of all participants, the relationship between researcher and participants, and themes that emerge during the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The portraitist functions as both researcher and artist.

The context of portraiture refers to the setting of the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). However, this setting encompasses more than just the physical location of the research and participants. It also includes the historical setting, the temporal setting, and even the cultural setting. In many forms of research, the researcher’s job is to eliminate any outside context that may taint the data. In portraiture, this context is used to provide a framework for the data. The researcher’s context can also play a key role (Latta & Thompson, 2011). The disparate context elements of the research come together to create the overall portrait.

There is voice in the portraiture paradigm in a way that it does not exist in other methodologies. The truly objective researcher largely falls into the realm of quantitative research (Kvale, 1995). In portraiture, voice has a larger role than in other qualitative methodologies. The portraitist’s voice must not overwhelm, hide, or supplant the voice of the participants, but it remains a visible and overt component. This does not imply or indicate that the research is not “deeply empirical, grounded in systemically collected data, skeptical questioning (of self and actors), and rigorous examination of biases”

(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). Voice is one of the tools the portraitist uses to “draw the picture” found in the data.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants is also a driving factor of the portraiture paradigm. The relationship between these individuals is a significant component of the data mining that occurs in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through the relationship between researcher and participants, the value in the data is more easily unearthed. Portraiture is a valid methodological tool because the relationship established, even if it is only a fleeting one, allows for the capture of voice and meaning from the participants (Chapman, 2007). Neither the researcher nor the participant can do this alone.

A key element of the portraiture paradigm is the identification and development of emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). While the researcher begins conducting research with a set of guiding questions, whether in the form of surveys, interviews, or other methods, the emergent themes are found after data collection. This is another aspect of portraiture which places a heavier emphasis on the researcher than other modes of qualitative research; the researcher is responsible for “tracing the emergent themes” as the narrative is crafted (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 11). The theme is carefully extracted from the raw data, identified as a part of the whole. The emergent themes ultimately lead to the aesthetic whole.

The aesthetic whole is the final element of portraiture, although it is nothing more than a combination of the previous elements of context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes as one (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). More importantly, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) assert that aesthetic quality and scientific rigor are not

contradictory. Research can both “draw a picture” of an event reflected in the data and still present the data in such a way as to accurately document the events as they transpired (Dixson et al., 2005). With the aesthetic whole, the portraitist seamlessly merges all of the elements of the research into a complete portrait, ready for consumption.

### **Quantitative Analyses**

Descriptive statistics provided a concise summary of the demographic data obtained from stakeholder participants. Although these descriptive statistics offered little in the way of analyses, they allowed for the researcher to describe the population (Krefting, 1991). All of the data utilized in the descriptive statistics was obtained from the student stakeholders by self-report. All analyses were conducted with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23).

Chi-square was used to examine the association between rank and activities for a survey question where student stakeholders ranked the six curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course in terms of impact on student success. Chi-square shows the goodness of fit between the expected random distribution of responses with actual student responses (Gibbons & Chakraborti, 2003). Chi-square, coupled with  $p$  value for significance, was used to frame the qualitative data on the six curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this mixed methods study, the researcher was the responsible party for data collection (interviews and surveys), transcription, and analysis. The quantitative data served two roles: to represent statistical data and to assist the researcher in finding a voice and framework for all of the data. As previously mentioned, one criticism of portraiture



is that researchers can only interpret data through their own personal lens (English, 2000). English (2000) claims that research consumers are unable to formulate their own interpretation of the data with portraiture; the researcher's "portrait" is the only visible and viable interpretation possible. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) do not necessarily agree with this bold assertion, as they state that "at the heart of the aesthetic experience – a primary condition – is a conversation between two active meaning-makers, the producer and the perceiver of a work of art" (p. 29). The primary researcher hopes that he and the consumer reach the same conclusions in the interpretation of the data and the method of its portrayal. Even if the minutiae of the "drawn portraits" vary between that written by the researcher and that read by the consumer, the end result – a portrait of the experiences of the stakeholders of a literacy intervention course – should still roughly be the same.

The researcher "drew the picture" crafted from the data, although all of the information used to "paint the portrait" was solely derived from the data. In the portraiture paradigm, understanding of the entire picture was only possible when the "aesthetic whole" of the data was constructed (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 261). It is the researcher's primary aim that the aesthetic whole crafted is genuine, authentic, and easily consumed while retaining the integrity of each individual stakeholder's experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher's role as a literacy intervention teacher undeniably impacted his role in the research. This is partially why portraiture was chosen as the qualitative methodology used. Rather than purposefully discard any potential bias, the researcher

instead chose to embrace this role and use it to craft the voice needed in this narrative. As this “portrait was painted,” the researcher purposefully used a controlled and restrained voice. The stakeholder stories presented in this research craft a narrative that is uniquely theirs, admittedly framed by the researcher’s use of “overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). This portrait encompasses both positive and negative stories; no apology is made as the researcher uses voice “as witness,” “as interpretation,” “as preoccupation,” “as autobiography,” as “discerning other voices,” and “in dialogue” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 87 -103). Ultimately, it is the researcher’s responsibility and duty to present this narrative in an unbiased and ethical manner.

To avoid the possibility of any student feeling as though their grade or performance was contingent upon a positive survey response, only those students who have already completed the literacy intervention course were allowed to take the survey. In addition, the survey was completely anonymous. Demographic data was collected from each participant, although no identifying information was obtained.

There was a \$50 gift card awarded to four random participants. The emails to identify the winning participants were collected with a separate survey, also delivered through Qualtrics. Email addresses were not linked to any survey responses. This incentive may have inflated response rate. However, the use of incentives is a standard procedure for eliciting a higher response rate (Ryu, Couper, & Marans, 2005). Cash incentives, even in the form of gift cards, do result in a greater response rate. The value of \$50 was specifically chosen as the university where this research is taking place has

policies for the payment of research participants. Any value below \$60 is considered modest remuneration.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

The literacy intervention course in this study has demonstrated efficacy in increasing student retention and GPA in certain populations as compared to the traditional developmental reading model (Super, 2016). This course, at the time of this study in its seventh year of existence, has undergone revisions while still staying focused on the academic mission of preparing students for the rigors of reading at the collegiate level.

This chapter describes the findings of this research project. Data are organized in a manner that reflects the conceptual framework of the literacy intervention course in this study and the transformational learning some students experience during this course. Each section contains extensive quotes and narratives that describe how stakeholder experiences fit or fail to conform to the conceptual framework of the course and the theory of transformational learning. The four research questions of this study also helped to shape the structure of this chapter.

RQ1: What was the theoretical framework on which the literacy intervention course was conceptualized and developed?

RQ2: How did the theoretical framework manifest in the curricular core competencies of the course?

RQ3: What curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course impact student success as identified by stakeholder reporting?

RQ4: What transformational learning experiences do students report as a result of the literacy intervention course?

The findings of this research are presented in this chapter and their connection to the research questions will be discussed in chapter five.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

In this section, the descriptive statistics of the student stakeholders provides an overview of the population obtained via survey sampling. Descriptive statistics including gender; ethnicity; current cumulative college GPA; level of education achieved by students' fathers and mothers; and literacy intervention course completion status are found in Tables 1 through 5.

As compared with data obtained from institutional research from the university of this literacy invention course, 206 students out of a potential 712 students responded to the survey. This response rate of 28.9% is acceptable, although the issue is murky due to a lack of a suggested minimum for response rates (Fowler, 2014). Higher response rates obviously lend to better statistical power, although as the present study was largely qualitative, this is less of an issue here. Response rates from surveys in general have also declined over time. Also of note is that surveys about educational issues tend to have smaller response rates than surveys regarding other issues (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Regardless, the survey responses received generated rich qualitative data.

When compared to the entire population, the responses are not necessarily representative for those areas where a comparison can be made. For the entire population, 44.52% were female and 55.48% were male, while the actual response rates were flipped, with 63.8% female and 36.2% male responding. This, however, is not surprising with females reporting a greater tendency to respond to surveys than males (Dey, 1997; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003). No ethnic comparisons can be easily made

with the response sample, as the university collects ethnic data in a different manner than was collected from the survey. If this population had consisted entirely of domestic students, then comparisons could be made; however, there were international students who took the survey, and the university has an ethnic category of “Nonresident alien” which was not captured by this survey, making comparisons futile. The remaining descriptive data on the population were obtained from self-report and are included to assist in “drawing a picture” of the representativeness of this sample.

Table 1

*Gender and Ethnicity of Student Stakeholder Respondents*

Ethnicity	Male	Female
Asian/Pacific Islander	15	16
Black/African American	12	28
Caucasian/White	35	73
Hispanic/Latino	4	9
Other	6	1
Total	72	127

Table 2

*Current Cumulative GPA of Student Stakeholder Respondents*

GPA	Frequency	Percent
1.0 - 2.0	9	4.4
2.0 - 3.0	69	33.5
3.0 - 4.0	113	54.9
Do not know	4	1.9
Prefer not to respond	3	1.5
Missing response	8	3.9
Total	206	100.0

Table 3

*Highest Level of School Completed by Father of Student Stakeholder Respondents*

Level of School	Frequency	Percent
Middle school	7	3.4
High school	56	27.2
2-year college	34	16.5
4-year college	46	22.3
Master's or higher	36	17.5
Do not know	15	7.3
Prefer not to respond	4	1.9
Missing	8	3.9
Total	206	100.0

Table 4

*Highest Level of School Completed by Mother of Student Stakeholder Respondents*

Level of School	Frequency	Percent
Elementary school	2	1.0
Middle school	7	3.4
High school	59	28.6
2-year college	35	17.0
4-year college	50	24.3
Master's or higher	32	15.5
Do not know	11	5.3
Missing	8	3.9
Total	206	100.0

Table 5

*Successful Completion of Literacy Intervention Course (A ,B, or C) as Self-Reported by Student Stakeholder Respondents*

Successful Completion	Frequency	Percent
Yes	191	92.7
No	3	1.5
Do not recall	4	1.9
Missing	8	3.9
Total	206	100.0

### **Course Creation**

The reading course was conceptualized by faculty at the regional southeastern university in this study who, working under the impetus of Senate Bill 1 (2009) to improve the retention rates and academic success of students, utilized best practices in literacy instruction to help ensure both student retention and create lifelong literacy learners. This course was also designed to combat several negative components of the existing remedial reading education available. The course would be for-credit, hopefully positively impact GPA, and be built around the best practices in literacy instruction.

### **Creation and Implementation**

As a relatively new course established in 2009, the creation of the literacy intervention course, hereafter referred to as LTCY 101, is well-documented. In describing the impetus for creation of LTCY 101, the course creator explained that the department director and provost approached her to discuss the possibility of a credit-bearing literacy intervention course for those underprepared in reading. She further explained,



A temporary course proposal was developed and taught in the summer of 2009 as part of a grant initiative through the Council on Post-Secondary Education (CPE) entitled 'Preparing for the Final 4.' Briefly, the grant paired a content course, Psychology 100, History 101, Sociology 100, and Political Science 110, with the new literacy course to serve rising high school seniors. The course was offered again in fall 2009 as a temporary course as the new course proposal worked its way through the undergraduate curricular process.

These three individuals were not the only individuals involved in the course creation.

Once the initial research was done and incorporated into the core structure of the course, the course proposal was shared with individuals at CPE who were involved in college readiness and with other literacy specialists and developmental reading instructors at both other institutions and at this university.

It is clear that the creation of this literacy intervention course was a joint effort by numerous individuals.

Each faculty member at the university also played unique, key roles in bringing this course to fruition. The course creator explained,

The provost provided coordination and communication with CPE, the Dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences (CEBS), the Department Head of STE, and the literacy faculty member targeted to develop course content. In addition, the provost also provided space renovation for the Center for Literacy, which is an auxiliary support where students, both those in LTCY 101 and the general student population, can come for extra literacy support.

The Dean of CEBS, meanwhile, provided the space for the Center for

Literacy. Perhaps most importantly, he provided advertisements for three new positions to teach LTCY 101 and financial support for the salaries of LTCY 101 instructors.

The Department Head of STE also ensured coordination and communication with the Provost's office. The department head provided opportunities for the literacy faculty member to attend essentials meetings at CPE related to college readiness and a time allowance to run the Center for Literacy, which was intricately tied to serving freshmen.

As the literacy faculty member intimately involved with course creation, I reviewed the literature and white papers on best practices and research findings regarding reading intervention at the collegiate level and college readiness in reading. I also developed the conceptual framework for the course, including curriculum development. I wrote the course proposal and followed it through the process of getting approval at the departmental level and then through college, the University Curriculum Committee, Senate Executive Committee, and finally at the Senate. In addition, I also formed and served on the search committee for instructors, and once these individuals were hired, I trained the instructors.

These individuals played key roles just in creating the course, prior to serving any students.

The faculty course creator provided a document, given to the president of the southeastern university housing this literacy intervention course, that delineates the goals and objectives of the course.

LTCY 101: Reading for Evidence and Argument, developed at [UNIVERSITY NAME REDACTED] in 2009, is a 3-hour course designed for students scoring 18-19 on the reading portion of the ACT. The emphasis of the course is on the development of high-level reading skills and strategic approaches to deep comprehension and analysis of academic texts. The philosophical stance of the course underscores a growth mindset as opposed to the “dip down” approach of developmental reading. It is expected that all students successfully completing LTCY 101 will be at the grade-level equivalent required of college sophomores. Key course experiences include exploration of and practice with a variety of strategies for gaining meaning from print and the study skills that college students need to be successful. Students develop self-awareness of their reading capabilities as they grow as efficient and flexible readers.

It is clear that this literacy intervention course is constructed to best meet the needs of the underprepared and under-practiced population of students most in need of it.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

When asked if there were any problems during the course creation process, the faculty course creator asserted that any change in the status quo for serving students usually meets with some resistance.

The shift from zero credit to credit-bearing is still something that is hotly debated on campuses. The main question is should students receive credit for obtaining skills that they should have had prior to being accepted at the university. People are divided on their stances regarding this paradigm and tend to hold very firm beliefs. One major foundation upon which LTCY 101 was designed is that it does

not ‘dip down’ to where students present when they first test into the course, but instead ‘stretches’ students to be ready for sophomore-level reading by the end of the course. We consider this to be the difference between a growth mindset and an approach whereby students are taught low level reading skills that should have been learned in middle or high school. A growth mindset uses Vygotsky’s theory of Proximal Development to support students where they are as they are challenged to greater and greater levels of sophisticated reading processes.

Vygotsky’s theory of Proximal Development states that individuals should be expected and encouraged to grow beyond their current level and provided with activities that stretch their boundaries (Vygostky, 1978). She used this theory extensively in designing the course.

LTCY 101 was also conceptualized to be different from the traditional developmental reading model. The course creator explained,

In designing LTCY 101, there were four things to keep mind. It must be credit bearing. It must maintain a philosophy of intervention, not remediation. It must incorporate research-based andragogical literacy practices, and it must have explicit applications to college reading in content coursework.

The name of the course went through a few changes, but we ultimately settled on “Reading for Evidence and Argument.” LTCY 101 was designed to prepare students to successfully meet the rigorous reading and other literacy requirements of college. There is an emphasis on refining skills necessary to extract factual evidence from text and make sound arguments through various modes of literacy.

Students must start immediately in credit-bearing courses with the supports in place necessary for their success. To be on track for retention and graduation, they need to take credit-bearing courses that allow them to *catch up* and then *keep up* with their literacy growth as they matriculate. To meet that demand, this 100-level credit-bearing course was designed based on existing research on the types of reading interventions that work with underprepared college students.

A fundamental difference between this course and the developmental alternative is the philosophy of intervention rather than remediation. Remedial and developmental courses “dip down” to reach students where they are when they first arrive in class. The philosophy behind LTCY 101 is that students need to urgently reach an independent reading level of at least a grade equivalency of 13 by the end of the course.

Two things are needed for college freshmen to quickly become independent in their reading skills and strategies. Reading and literacy courses must be developed that are sound in research-based curricula, consider students’ strengths and weaknesses, and provide skills and strategy instruction for reading comprehension of complex text. These courses must help students understand how to learn new words and grow their academic vocabularies. Effective courses must allow students multiple learning experiences as they practice the new skills and strategies, receiving feedback, redirection, and validation of growth. Students must want to enhance their literacy skills. No course will impact students’ levels

of literacy unless students value the role of reading in learning and decide to take responsibility of their own learning.

The problem with teaching and learning literacy skills in isolation is that students must then transfer that learning to real-world situations. The closer the learning experiences are to the types of reading required in heavy-reading courses, the more likely skills and strategies learned will be immediately implemented for the purposes of success in other credit-bearing required courses. LTCY 101 makes direct efforts to ensure that all tasks, assignments, and learning experiences are authentic, focused, strategy-based, supported by research, and readily transferable to content courses.

Some of the unique characteristics of the course include a focus on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and related study and metacognitive skills and strategies; a growth model to rapidly increase reading and comprehension levels; non-traditional course structure, content, and delivery; student-centered choice on assignment as appropriate; a cognitive and inquiry-based approach with authentic materials; rigor and relevance in all assignments; and a significant research project.

These conceptual elements, married with Vygotsky's theory of proximal development, merged to create this literacy intervention course.

With the basic understanding of the course structure, the andragogical theories and practices utilized in LTCY 101 development was the next focus. The course creator further described these theories and practices.

Six factors that are determinants of success in college are also integral components of LTCY 101. Any initiative to address student learning has to take into account characteristics that make up the complete learning *package* that is required of each student to be successful at the university level.

Completing a course, regardless of the objectives, is not enough for student success.

Students must also internalize certain characteristics to achieve academic success. The faculty course creator identified the six characteristics crucial for student success as:

Students must attend class. If you don't go to class, you won't be successful.

Students must be prepared for class. They should perceive instructors as experts.

It is crucial that students take responsibility for their own learning, develop a repertoire of study skills strategies, and adhere to an organized study routine.

Those who can internalize these six elements will be more successful than students who do not.

Furthermore, these six characteristics can be even more impactful for student success on underprepared students.

While the six characteristics listed above are common to all successful university students, underprepared students face additional challenges and therefore need to reach more levels of success than their more prepared peers. The first big obstacle to overcome is acknowledgment of needing assistance, followed closely by asking for assistance.

Unfortunately, according to the faculty course creator, "Those who most need academic help are often those least likely to pursue it." The implications for instructors serving this population are that to achieve greater levels of student success, the instructors must do

more than provide access to a literacy intervention course. Deeper interventions are required.

These interventions exist at this university in a few forms, including auxiliary supports such as the Center for Literacy and cross-curricular and cross-department collaborations. She added,

Students are also more successful if they take courses that integrate reading instruction across disciplines compared to taking stand-alone reading courses.

This is one area that requires the university to provide tremendous support, as one department could not accomplish this alone.

As evidenced by the dean's and provost's support of the Center for Literacy, this university has gone to greater lengths to best serve this underprepared and underpracticed population. The faculty course creator addressed this element of social learning as a key component of literacy learning.

Students need to be in constant connectivity in engaged, inquiry-based, learning communities. Paths include options for group learning sessions allowing for instruction couched within social interactions, trust-building frameworks, and electronic communications between learning sessions. Learning components within LTCY 101 are aligned with the researched-based practices. Students must know when, why, and how to apply any new strategy; students must have time to apply new strategies; strategy instruction must be content embedded; and students must be metacognitive in their reflection and evaluation of their own learning.

Significant research indicates that linking strategic reading course with reading-intensive courses results in greater achievement (Simpson, Stahl, & Francis, 2004; Stallworth-



Clark, Nolen, Warkentin, & Scott, 2000). As previously stated, the linkage of a reading course with a content course could not occur without significant cooperation from other university colleges and departments.

The connection between LTCY 101 and the auxiliary support of the Center for Literacy remains tantamount to the success of students in LTCY 101. After the primary researcher asked about any other aspects of LTCY 101 or other related auxiliary supports, the faculty course creator elaborated on the services provided by the Center for Literacy:

The Center for Literacy is greatly enhancing this university's ability to serve students who come to the university underprepared to read and study at the college level through direct services to students and through outreach efforts to school systems within the service area. The structure of services for students underprepared to meet the rigorous reading demands of college reading is central to the mission of the Center for Literacy. Further, the Center greatly enhances opportunities for research agendas for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students at this university as well as boosting the potential for grant and other funding prospects. The Center for Literacy allows for facility development, faculty development, and programmatic development necessary for this university to compete for awards, funding, and research initiatives that are essential for state and nationally recognized excellence within the field of literacy.

The Center includes full-team reading specialists; College Reading Success for on-campus students and for distance sites through multi-media synchronous technologies; Literacy Learning Labs available to students, faculty and the community; diagnostic testing in reading and learning (full-scale

psychological services); screening testing for reading and learning; a full range of school psychological services; assistive technologies available with appropriate training; technology-based interventions; individual and small group intervention and strategy-based learning; literacy and reading services for adults at the Levels 1 and 2 (pre-GED); professional development services for P-12 teachers; parent training sessions for working with adolescents who are struggling readers; personalized consultations and analysis of strengths and weaknesses; and up-to-date, success-oriented motivational techniques and services.

Indeed, rather than just serving students, this auxiliary support service is designed to operate in a manner that can serve the entire university and community.

### **Course Objectives**

The faculty course creator described the process of the course creation and its anticipated role in the academic success of underprepared and under-practiced students. She also shared the syllabus for the course, which provided the philosophy behind the course, the course description, and the course objectives. The philosophy of LTCY 101 states,

Reading is inquiring about, constructing, and evaluating one's own understanding of texts and real world issues. It is a natural, strategic process of interaction between readers, their context and text. Strategic reading is a dynamic process that evolves through ongoing dialogue and experimentation.

The course also places an “emphasis on development of high-level reading skills and strategic approaches to deep comprehension and analysis of academic texts.”

The faculty course creator also described the specific course objectives for LTCY 101.

The course objectives are what we wanted students to learn by the end of the course. We want students to demonstrate strategic reading processes, both inductively and deductively. Students should demonstrate competency in interpretation of and critical thinking within academic texts. We want students to employ cognitive strategies to construct meaning at the critical, interpretive, and creative levels, and we want to see students demonstrate enhanced fluency and automaticity.

Basically, students who successfully complete LTCY 101 should be reading more critically and be capable of manipulating increasingly complex texts.

Of course, these objectives are reflected in various activities throughout the LTCY 101 curriculum.

### **No Specific Content**

The course creator also expanded upon an unusual component of LTCY 101. While some courses have clearly established content, LTCY 101, as a strategy-driven course, differs significantly. She said,

One unusual aspect of LTCY 101 is the lack of direct content. We are teaching literacy strategies, but we do this with an imported content. There are strategies in the course, and the instructors – or even the students – bring in content from other domains. Our students may read about psychology in LTCY 101. They may read about biology. They'll read the texts from their other classes. LTCY

101 is about providing and teaching strategies for students to internalize, practice, and use in deciphering other texts.

The beauty of a non-content course like LTCY 101 is that it easily avails itself to students practicing their strategies with reading from their other courses.

She also explained how this factored into the overall class structure. She explained,

Literacy consists of four elements: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Every activity in the course addresses one or more of these elements. The instructors have some leeway in how these strategies are presented, but there are certain elements that appear in every section of this course.

In the following three sections, the four elements of literacy and how they appear in LTCY 101 are explained.

### **Reading**

While all four elements of literacy receive significant focus of LTCY 101, reading is the most critical. The faculty course creator said,

Reading takes place with every single assignment in this course. There are weekly reading guides, where students are introduced to specific reading strategies that they then practice with authentic texts. Prior to the practice, they will also read from a book that I and one of the instructors wrote, specifically for this course. This provides an opportunity for the students to be exposed to the strategy before they practice it in class. There is a book club, which also occurs every week. Students read books or articles that lend themselves to class discussions.

When asked to clarify about the types of books read during book club, she said, “*Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell has been used for several semesters to great success. It allows for great discussions about being successful in college.”

## **Writing**

Both formal and informal writing assignments are made during the class. The writing assignments manifest in a few different ways. The faculty course creator explained,

One of the biggest assignments for the class is a research writing project. The topics students write about vary. Instructors have had entire sections of students write on the same topic, they’ve allowed students’ choice... One of the important things about the writing is that all of the sources for the writing must be from peer-reviewed sources. The instructors also teach how to find research articles, how to evaluate them, and how to synthesize the information for a formal academic research paper. This is obviously an important strategy that students will utilize in other courses.

There are also informal writings on a regular basis. Students may be asked to write a response during book club or to reflect on various aspects of the course. Even though the writing isn’t formal research, the instructors still hold students to the standards of strong, academic writing.

## **Speaking and Listening**

While reading and writing are the two most expected elements of literacy, speaking and listening also receive considerable attention in LTCY 101. The faculty course creator described these two literacy components in greater depth.

These two elements occur in every single book club. Book club isn't a lecture; while the instructor may ask leading questions or share personal insights, students ultimately drive the book club discussion. They speak by participating, and all students are encouraged to speak. Speaking in book club is even incentivized. Listening, of course, is also a key component of this. Students respond to the instructor and they respond to each other.

There are also presentations in class. Instructors may vary the structure of the presentations, but they require speaking as the delivery method. Meanwhile, the other students have to listen and attend to the information being presented to them, as they may be responsible for it later in class, perhaps in a writing or another discussion.

### **Curricular Core Competencies**

This literacy intervention course is structured around specific elements, strategies, and habits that students need to learn, practice in context, and internalize for academic success. Although related, these six components, termed “curricular core competencies” by course faculty, are different from the six characteristics needed for student success as noted by the faculty course creator. The curricular core competencies are, in no particular order, reading strategies and reading guides; book club and class discussions; academic writing and research; formal presentations; motivation and responsibility; and work ethic and habit building.

In the faculty stakeholders interviews, the two instructors described their experiences with these six elements of the course. Students responded to these elements as well during the student stakeholder survey. In addition to open-ended questions,

students also ranked these six items, based upon their perceived impact on their own personal academic growth. Each section will describe the rating students ascribed to each competency via frequency reporting.

Student stakeholders also ranked the six curricular core competencies in order of benefit in terms of success. Items were ranked one for most benefit and six for least benefit. These frequency data are presented in Table 6. Chi-square test was conducted on frequency data of each item. The expected frequencies for all competencies in this chart were 30.3. Of course, these data were not in normal distribution. “Book Club and Class Discussions” had the greatest number of students ranking it as the least beneficial in terms of impact. Students were generally favorable of the other four competencies, “Reading Strategies and Reading Guides,” “Formal Presentations,” “Academic Writing and Research,” and “Motivation and Responsibility,”  $p < .05$ . All items were significant, with the exception of “Work Ethic & Habit Building” with a  $p$ -value of .209, which means students do not have a strong preference for this focus.

There are interesting trends in these data, beyond the vast majority of students ranking “Book Club and Class Discussions” as the least impactful in terms of success. While “Reading Strategies and Reading Guides” had the highest ranking, “Academic Writing and Research,” “Motivation and Responsibility,” and “Work Ethic and Habit Building” were all very close in highest ranking.

Students also rated each of the six curricular core competencies based upon how important each was to their growth as a student. These data can be seen below in Table 7. Further discussion of these six items and their relevance to student learning are in the following sections.

Table 6

*Ranking of Curricular Core Competencies in Terms of Success by Student Stakeholders*

	Reading Guides	Book Club	Formal Presentations	Writing	Motivation	Work Ethic
Chi-Square	15.868	172.396	33.934	16.396	24.703	7.165
<i>p</i> -value	.007	.000	.000	.006	.000	.209
Rank 1	43	5	26	36	34	38
Rank 2	26	14	37	38	36	31
Rank 3	32	12	54	36	24	24
Rank 4	31	20	31	37	35	28
Rank 5	36	39	22	18	44	23
Rank 6	14	92	12	17	9	38
Total	182	182	182	182	182	182

Table 7

*Rating of Curricular Core Competencies in Terms of Importance to Student Growth by Student Stakeholders*

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Total Responses	Mean
Reading Guides	4	22	81	91	198	3.31
Book Club	17	54	85	41	197	2.76
Formal Presentations	2	24	63	106	195	3.40
Writing	1	17	62	118	198	3.50
Motivation	0	11	73	114	198	3.52
Work Ethic	0	18	56	124	198	3.54



## **Reading Strategies and Reading Guides**

For a literacy intervention course, it seems that it might be obvious that reading would be viewed as one of the most important components of the course. As seen in Table 6, more students ranked “Reading Strategies and Reading Guides” as the most important of the six curricular core competencies in terms of student success. Table 7 shows data where students were asked to rank this item on a Likert scale as not important, somewhat important, important, and very important. Of the 198 respondents for this item, only four students ranked “Reading Strategies and Reading Guides” as “not important.” “Somewhat important” was the ranking for 22 students, followed by 81 as “important” and 91 as “very important.” By assigning a value of one to not important, two to somewhat important, three to important, and four to very important, the “Reading Strategies and Reading Guides” curricular core competency had a mean score of 3.31.

**No content challenges.** When asked about the important implications from an instructor’s perspective about reading guides, Instructor One mentioned the challenges and opportunities that arose from teaching a course without a specific content.

LTCY 101 does not have content in the way that a typical course has content. For instance, if you take history, you learn about history. If you take biology, you learn about biology. History and biology are, respectively, the contents of both of those courses. Conversely, if you take LTCY 101, yes, we do teach about literacy, but that’s not the bulk of this course. The heart of this course, the impetus, what we do, is to improve reading, and we don’t necessarily do that by teaching reading. We do that by practicing and by teaching strategies, and we require our students to put in significant time. Of course, we can’t do this without

content. Reading can't be taught in a vacuum, so we provide our own content. We use articles of interest or book chapters that mimic what our students experience in the college classroom. There is a content, but we could literally teach LTCY 101 using any college-level reading text.

I almost feel sorry for the professors who are trapped by the content who don't feel like they can stray from the path to connect with the students and actually give them what they need in real time with the things they are struggling with. The fact of the matter is, I believe most of our students don't struggle with the content, they struggle with accessing the content. That's the problem. They can't get to the point where they say I don't understand the content because they... they're not listening well enough to their lectures, they're not reading well enough what is assigned. These literacy aspects, they're the conduit to the content. So they really appreciate us because we are the conduit to the content.

Instructor Two added to this, emphasizing the difference between LTCY 101 and other content-driven general education courses that freshmen typically take.

Our class is unique in the fact that we have an opportunity to provide a different type of support other than educational. That's the biggest thing I think students say. All of my student comments from student evaluations are always 'she was really supportive' or 'she really cared that we learned' or 'she made sure that we understood.' I place all of this on the fact that we teach reading strategies, which is a very different thing than teaching content. It is unique to the setup of our course that we are able to provide this type of assistance. I got an email yesterday that said, 'You're an awesome teacher. Thanks so much for making sure I always

got it.’ The fact that there isn’t an entire class period full of lecture over content, too, means we have an opportunity to be in a small group and interact with students versus one hundred students to one faculty.

Both literacy faculty members were emphatic in the role that teaching strategies separate from content is a key component of the success in LTCY 101.

**Additional instructor support.** Both instructors stated that the reading component of the course was one area where the literacy faculty could provide more support than could professors in other classes.

Specific reading strategies play a large role in the structure of LTCY 101. Instructor One said, “There are some strategies we have discarded and others that have been mainstays since the beginning. Occasionally, we’ll find a new one that proves to be useful for students.” When asked for clarification on the specific strategies, Instructor Two offered her opinion on their utility for students.

There are strategies for a variety of different types of learners. We have visualizing, which we keep because a few students report that they especially like it. I am personally a fan of text annotation and coding. Cornell notes is one strategy that students say they enjoy because I don’t think they quite know how to take notes. A lot of them comment that in high school they didn’t learn how to take notes and this class provides different types of strategies. One, known as SQ3R, allows them to be able to really dive into the text and make sense of it.

I think that’s where students are lacking and that’s why they can’t understand the content because they don’t know how to read it and they need

some kind of strategy. Typically they find one that they really enjoy, that they can do effectively.

I always tell my students, if you can find one strategy out of the entire semester that is useful to you, then I've done my job. You don't have to use every strategy. Keep the ones that work for you and discard the rest. If mind mapping doesn't make sense to you, try it and then get rid of it.

I personally dislike summarizing as a strategy. I have a great activity for it in class called 'The Incredible Shrinking Notecard,' but I do not use it on my own. I much prefer text coding. Of course, I don't tell my students this before I teach it to them, because I don't want to influence their opinion of it.

The instructors also incorporate a "You Pick" reading strategy at the end, where students are allowed the freedom to choose which of the strategies covered that semester they prefer to use on an assigned reading.

**Specific purposes of reading guides.** Instructor One explained how the strategies are chosen with a careful, specific purpose.

One thing I always say is the strategies that we teach in the class fulfill all four components of literacy, which are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. And they have to understand how the human brain works and of course that is the focus of my class, but I focus on when you're presented information, you're only presented with it in two ways. You either see it or you hear it. So you read it or you listen to it in a lecture. So remember it's reading, writing, listening, and speaking, so that's two of them.

And then if you're going to actually learn the information, and you need to study it, then it has to come back out of you. So it came in through your eyes or ears, and has to circulate within you and your brain so hopefully it connects to something to remember. It has to come back to materialize and that's where the other two components of literacy come in, which are speaking and writing. There are only two ways it can leave you; it can come out of your mouth or in written form. And so with that foundation, with every strategy that we teach in the course, they understand how it fulfills that sequence, how it relates to the purpose of the course, which is literacy and it provides for them like a specific prescriptive approach. Try it for a week, try it on our reading guide, try it in your other classes. And if it doesn't work, that's okay. There are more strategies, we'll keep going. And just like she said, at the end of the course if you find one that makes sense to you, then great.

Instructor Two added the proof of the strength of reading strategies that is evident in student performance.

Every time at the end of the semester, they think everything got easier and I told them yesterday, 'Class didn't get easier, the articles didn't get easier, you actually got better at knowing how to read information and remember it.'

Despite occupying only one component of the course, reading strategies are clearly powerful tools utilized in LTCY 101, as evidence both by faculty stakeholder comments, student data, and student comments, which will be discussed later in this section.

**Impact of literacy skills.** The instructors were asked to discuss the impact of literacy skills on this freshman population. Instructor One explained the importance for

college freshmen to have strong reading skills, coupled with larger issues at the university level.

It is very common for students to say, ‘Thank you for the class, because it’s really helped me.’ Okay, that’s a compliment and I appreciate that, but it’s like a broader level of need all across higher education is when students say to me, ‘What would I have done if I hadn’t had the class?’ And you know, they think, yes, it helped me. Yes, I appreciate it, but I keep thinking, what do students do who don’t have this?

A guy came back for help three weeks ago; he was in my office and he says, ‘One of my best friends is in this same class’ - that he’s in seeking help for right now - and he said, ‘He doesn’t know what to do because he scored a 22 on his ACT in reading and he didn’t have LTCY 101 like I had and he does not know what to do. Nobody has taught him this.’ And he was coming back for some supplemental help from me, but I think that is a larger concern. Do students who just for some reason missed having the opportunity for an entire semester-long course that is devoted to these things we’re talking about... do they not get the benefits? What if you don’t have that?

There is no structural delivery here to learn these things. Professors, and almost rightly so, assume that you know it. They just assume you know how to read a research paper or how to write and cite in APA or the appropriate format. They think you know what plagiarism is. They assume they can assign to you an entire chapter of a textbook that, if you look at it, it’s written on a 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade level and that you will understand it and come to class prepared. They

assume that, and because it's not their discipline, they don't teach you how to do it. Even if they don't assume it, they don't teach you how to do it; it's not their discipline. So, when students come back to me and say 'What would I have done if I didn't have this?' I think that speaks to a larger issue.

Instructor Two nodded and was clear in her body language that she agreed with Instructor One's assessment. The reading component of the class, if not the entire class itself, is the last attempt some students have to achieve success in college-level reading. They are possibly being academically challenged for the first time, and if supports are not provided, students are less likely to be successful.

Instructor Two added,

And maybe that's why... maybe as freshman they don't see that, they don't see the importance of these strategies. They came here as freshmen and I've had students say, 'I'm insulted I have to be here. I know how to read.' And that's when I explain to them, 'This isn't a course to teach you how to read. This is a course to prepare you for the rigors of reading in college, which your ACT reading scores does not indicate you are ready for.' Your brain is like a muscle. You have to train it, and you aren't trained yet to use it like a college student. No shame in that, just a fact. There are exceptions, but the majority are not ready. And frankly, I feel like we could teach this course to students with higher ACT scores and still see positive results.

I feel like if these freshmen look back as college juniors or seniors, they'll realize it. We've seen this, when students come back to us for whatever reason. I tell them, 'You have to be able to use text, you have to be able to support your

claims when you write a research paper,’ and that’s what I feel like we do in LTCY 101. Whereas the strategy teaches them to be able to read well and be active and all that. It’s more than vital. Without it, they won’t be successful. The passion these two faculty stakeholders held for both the class and the students they are serving were palpable in their comments and enthusiasm.

**Student input.** Student stakeholders also had a great deal to add about the reading strategy component of class. Across all of the open-ended questions students could answer, 97 comments were about the reading strategies in class. Of these, 91, at 93.8%, were coded as “positive” and six, the remaining 6.2%, were coded as “negative.” The following represents all of the negative comments and a portion of the positive comments that were particular germane to a discussion of the reading guides and strategies.

One student made the statement that one thing he or she would change about the course was to have “less reading guides.” Another stated that, “There was a lot of reading that I felt was necessary at times for certain things but some was busy work.” Several students criticized the choice of reading material. Comments included, “While the reading strategies help me stay on track, I think if the material was more interesting, then I would’ve done even better” and “I didn’t like the fact that we had to read so much because that is not a favorite thing of mine.”

These were the entirety of the negative comments about the reading guides. The remaining comments were all positive about the benefit the reading guides and reading strategies had on their performance and success. Some students even credited the benefits of the reading strategies with their ultimate success in college.



Literacy 101 was a very helpful as an incoming freshman. I was required to take the course because I came into college with a low reading ACT score, and Literacy 101 gave me a much better understanding on how to use reading strategies to understand, comprehend, and apply text in multiple ways. I am very thankful for the Literacy 101 course.

Comments such as these were not isolated. One student said, “I would recommend this class to anyone who struggles with reading because it would really help them out in the future.” Another remarked,

The most positive aspects of having taken LTCY 101 would have to be learning new ways to read faster, comprehend, and write professional papers as a college student. This class I can say shaped me into the college student I am today with a 3.5 GPA. It gave me not only the motivation but also the confidence to do better in my studies.

Multiple students confirmed that this literacy intervention course provided them with confidence in reading. “I’m able to retain more when I read. It gave me academic confidence.” “It enhanced important skills that I thought I excelled at. I learned to take better notes. I was able to read and understand class materials better.” “The reading strategies I learned in LTCY 101 helped me tremendously when reading long articles, and I still use the reading strategies I was taught in LTCY 101 in my major Elementary Education classes.”

Reading strategies are skills I have used in every single class at WKU. I am thankful to have been taught these at the beginning of my college career. I can still remember the book we read about taking the stairs and how when you get in

the habit, you almost feel guilty for taking the elevator.

Numerous examples were given of students finding positive results from LTCY 101 even semesters later.

Even those students who initially viewed the course as a negative sometimes reported the impact they received on their reading skills.

I think just the fact that I was forced into taking this class gave me a negative feel for it. Of course, at that time I did not think I had an issue and my reading skills were great. When really they weren't. Going through the class I realized I did really need this course and it has actually helped.

As before, comments like this were not received in isolation.

The reading strategies helped me become more confident in other classes. I thought I was going to hate this class but it ended up being my favorite class and taught me a lot of useful information that has helped my college writing assignments and made reading assignments a lot easier.

The class has clearly targeted some of the issues that underprepared and under-practiced students experience.

Students mention how the reading strategies and reading guides helped them grow their skills to address the more complex texts and increased reading load encountered later in their coursework. "LTCY 101 helped me in building up a reading habit which I lacked before. It helps me understand my courses better while I'm reading a textbook, and I also have a better understanding about newspaper articles and other texts." Another student said,

Taking this class I've learned a whole lot. I was taught how to read long reading assignments and making them easier to get all the information out of it. I use my skills in writing research papers from that class. I learned a lot honestly and it's hard to put into words. I love the class.

“Walking out of this course as a freshman with confident college reading abilities, great presenting skills, and good work ethics has helped me succeed in all of my classes.”

Another student remarked, “I read totally differently from when I arrived at college.”

Multiple students echoed this theme about completely changing their reading perspective.

“This course taught me how to be a better reader and fully comprehend what I’m reading.” “LTCY 101 has helped me prioritize my reading and learning habits. I learned that I do not have to read an entire paper to understand what it is talking about.” “The reading strategies still help me in my other courses.” “I am now a better reader than I was before.” “It has helped me figure out which way is best for me to comprehend information.” These comments are not exhaustive from the student stakeholders.

One student made a statement that accurately reflected the instructor’s perspective on the importance of reading. “I think the most positive aspects were that I did more reading than I thought I would, which bettered my reading skills.” Another said that a great change instilled in them from LTCY 101 is the habit of “reading consistently.” To summarize, one student indicated the impact the improvement on reading gave him or her that was not present before. “I think the most positive aspects for me were having to read the chapters, because if I read the chapters, I felt like I was on top of the world and could answer any questions.” For this underprepared and under-practiced population, this seems to be a feeling that many students did not experience before the class.

## **Book Club and Class Discussions**

Book club and class discussions receive a great deal of importance within the structure of LTCY 101. Instructor One explained, “Roughly half of all seat time is spent in book club discussions.”

Instructor Two added, “These discussions emulate what students will experience in higher level classes. They may not get to discuss much during a freshman-level class, but the skills they learn in these discussions will be needed during their undergraduate career.”

Table 7 shows, however, that book club has the lowest mean in student stakeholder ratings of the six curricular core competencies for student growth. Table 6 reveals that students find book club to be the least impactful for them in terms of success. Both faculty stakeholders, however, believe that book club was a powerful component of the class. Instructor One explained,

The idea of book club I love. The interaction of book club I love. This idea that everybody reads a book, you know, it’s not a textbook, it’s ‘let’s read something that is interesting and let’s discuss ideas.’ You’re getting every part of literacy; they’re reading, they’re writing as reflections or they’re writing to express their understanding as part of a grade or an entry ticket and there are lots of listening, lots of speaking.

In some of the informal ways we’ve tried to evaluate students’ perception of book club, they’ve pretty consistently put it low and that is so surprising to me because it seems like they enjoy it. This could be encouraging even though it’s surprising because they could be more discerning than we give them credit for.

They could recognize, ‘While I enjoyed that part, that didn’t carry over to my other courses like the core part of class when I learned to write papers and I learned how to listen and take notes and when I learned how to study and to be active when I read and all that. While that was more work, it was more laborious, I might not have enjoyed book club as much. I could be objective enough to say that actually helped me more than the skills I obtained when I read and then discussed it at book club.’

Instructor Two added,

Well, I think it makes them think more than during the other aspects of the course in some ways. I feel like in book club, I require them to do more thinking and that might be part of the reason too that it doesn’t always go as well.

Despite their comments, their tone of voice and mannerisms when discussing book club made it clear that they both enjoyed book club as a class activity.

**Challenges.** The instructors also explained some of the unique challenges that arise during book club that are not present during other components of the course.

Instructor One said,

Students have to be active during book club, and some students prefer to be passive students. ‘Let me come to class, you do your thing, I’ll sit here and not interrupt and when you say we can leave, I’ll leave, so I did my part.’ So students need to be much more engaged, and that’s just a struggle for some students.

Instructor Two nodded and clarified, “The pressure is on the students. They seem to think, ‘Avoid eye contact. Maybe she won’t call on me, maybe she won’t know that I didn’t read.’”

**Potential changes.** Despite the evidence from student surveys that book club and class discussions are the least impactful component of the class for success, the instructors do not, at present, have plans to change the format of book club. Instructor one explained,

I think if we eliminated book club, I don't think that's on the table, but hypothetically if we eliminated book club, I think the first thing to take a huge hit would be the camaraderie in the course.

The environment of the course I think is shaped as such because once we get into book club enough and people hear each other talk and it's interactive and they are in groups and doing those things. A lot of those things disappear and it comes back to mimic more of that lecture type of 'I'm delivering information to you' which stagnates the environment and becomes more like a college course.

So, I think that would be a victim of us cutting book club.

Instructor Two emphatically agreed, saying, "Book club is powerful, and like I said earlier, I do think students will recognize the strength of it later. And that's not even including the benefit that we do see from students during the semester."

The instructors did, however, emphasize that aspects of book club change regularly. Instructor One said, "We change things regularly. Every semester looks a bit different than the one before it." Instructor Two said,

I changed the way that I do book club. It used to be more discussion based where students would just take whatever question I asked and they were able to get the conversation going on their own, and I did not participate nearly as much as I felt like I have the last few semesters. Then, over the last few semesters, I've put the

responsibility of carrying the discussion more on them and I've done more group work and then let them talk out. It seems like they need more time to be able to generate their own thoughts than they used to.

Instructor One added,

I think that is largely because of them because in years past – it's like a domino or spark... Somebody would start a conversation, usually by a prompt that I would say in class and then somebody would pick up on it and you could just watch that thought work its way through the room. Now, it's like pulling teeth to get anyone to speak so...I think they've dictated our change in behavior and I think it's probably a positive change. I'm not saying we've done it to acquiesce to them in a negative way. But, now I have to contrive scenarios to make them think, discuss, and then speak out because I can't rely on them to do it like I used to.

Instructor Two continued,

I had to change because it used to be... I always had a least four or five really strong students that would speak up and they would encourage other people to talk. Now, typically in the classroom I might have one or two that are ready to share and want to bounce ideas off of me or share and talk and start a discussion. I don't see them interact as much anymore and therefore had to come up with the group work.

The passion that these two faculty stakeholders had, both for the potential of book club discussion and the benefits it brought to students, was evident in their discussion. As both shared, they have already noted that students frequently rank book club low on

internal class surveys, but they still see enough positive impact from students that they do not wish to eliminate it.

**Student input.** While student stakeholders may have both ranked and rated book club lower than the other six curricular core competencies on issues of student growth and student success, this does not necessarily indicate that they did not appreciate it. A mean of 2.76 still indicates that students rated it somewhere between somewhat important and important. Students also shared some positive feedback about book club. However, there were only 27 comments from students about book club, compared to 97 comments about the reading guides and strategies. Of these 27 comments, five, at 18.5%, were negative and the remaining 22 comments at 81.5% were positive.

The negative comments all had a very common theme. “I hate book club. Pick more interesting things to read.” “Maybe more interesting books.” “I would only suggest more fun books be added to book club.” The other negative comment about book club was, “I would take out book club because it was my least favorite because I hate reading.”

When presented with these findings, Instructor Two said, “The majority of students have stated they do like the books. Of course not everyone will; I don’t think anyone has written the book everyone likes. When they do and it’s a useful text, I’ll use it in class.” Instructor One added,

Three thoughts. First, I don’t care if students don’t like the book. There are lots of things in college that students won’t like to do that they need to do. Secondly, freshmen frequently have difficulty divorcing their personal likes from what is ultimately good for them academically. And thirdly, there are plenty of students



who do like these books. The books we use are popular press books. Like [Instructor Two] said, not everyone will like them, but the majority of our students do.

When asked about the popular press books used, Instructor Two said, “We have used *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell since the beginning. I know another instructor has used *Switch* before, and we’ve used McRaney’s *You Are Not So Smart* for several semesters.”

Student stakeholder comments also verified their claim that some students do enjoy the books. “I really liked reading the motivational/life help books.” “Reading the books in class were very interesting, and I think that they were positive in the aspect that everyone could relate to the topic in some way or another while sharing their thoughts and beliefs.”

Another common positive theme from students was the discussion that took place during book clubs. “I loved talking in book clubs!” “I really enjoyed LTCY 101 as a freshman. It allowed me to speak up in class, which led to making friends who were also taking the class.” One student stated his favorite part of class was, “Discussions and in-class activities. I also really enjoyed the books we read.” “Being able to discuss things in class.” “This class taught me that it’s okay to speak in class and it helps you learn more. I was a really shy student until I took this class.” “LTCY 101 helped me be a lot more open in class.” Another student enjoyed “working together on problems in class and figuring them out.”

One international student also appreciated book club, sharing a unique perspective on it that domestic students may not experience. “My concern [in this course] was to

improve my ability of speaking correct English and reading the current English texts. That is why I put book club at the top of my list.”

It is important to note that the negative comments about book club were all related to personal preference in the form of a distaste for the books selected. The favorable comments all lauded the strengths of book club. It is worth noting that book club generated fewer comments than all the other curricular core competencies except for motivation/responsibility and work ethic/habit building.

### **Academic Writing and Research**

Writing is also a vital component of the skillset students need to be successful in college. LTCY 101 has both a formal writing component in the form of a research paper and informal writings throughout the semester. The faculty stakeholders explained how they address writing in LTCY 101. Instructor Two began,

There is a formal research paper on a specific topic. Students are walked through the entire process, from crafting the research question to finding the sources to citing appropriately. We spend several days just teaching proper APA format. We do several drafts, but there is just one final draft done near the end of the semester.

Instructor One added,

A big paper due at the end of the year is common in higher ed. In the past, we would get terrible papers at the end because the students wait until the end and then it's a last minute job. So we have built into the content the supports to say, 'Let's do it a piece at a time so you get feedback from us.' If we need to adjust the calendar of class... because we're not bound by the delivery of content, we

can call timeout on the course calendar, take an entire day; it just happened to me this semester.

I'll take an entire day to go over a writing assignment again because I noticed after they turned in a paragraph of the paper, there are things we need to talk about again. So we just called timeout and we had an entire class period where we discussed the common issues per individual section of the course that we needed to address and that's built into the kind of curricular device of the course.

Both faculty stakeholders were in agreement and nodding as the other spoke. Both clarified that all LTCY 101 faculty teach the writing components of the course in largely the same manner.

**Student response to writing and research.** The instructors also had several comments on student responses to the extended writing and research process. Instructor Two said,

I think many of them have never written a paper in high school, so for this class, it really helps them a lot for their writing and being able to transfer that hopefully to another class but a lot of them have said writing in pieces, being able to do research, learning how to read a research article... a lot of them have never used anything other than a book or something pretty simplistic so to have to learn how to read a research article and understand it and be able to annotate it, that's an important skill. A lot of them have made comments about how they feel better prepared now to actually go write a paper in class because a lot of classes, like he said, it's one paper and it's due at the end. So nobody is really helping them and

giving them feedback and they're not even sure what they're doing incorrect until they get that final grade and it's too late. I think they appreciate this slower, more methodical pace, even if some find it unusual to begin with.

Instructor One added, "This academic research paper has changed structure on us many times, because we are always refining and trying to give our students the most useful strategy for writing that we can."

While students are not aware of the changes that occur from semester to semester, the faculty members do their best to provide appropriate writing instruction for their students.

**Informal writing activities.** In addition to formal writing, the instructors also include informal writing activities in the course. Instructor One said,

We do informal writing almost every day. I might have an open-response question on a quiz. They definitely need to write at every book club, because I give two or three open-ended questions to both check their reading and get them thinking about what will occur during class discussion that day.

Instructor Two added,

I do several writing activities over the semester. One that I start with, on the first day of class, is a writing prompt about what they will do to be a successful student. On the last day of class, I give them back this same writing prompt and reflect on whether or not they achieved their goals. It's a pretty humorous activity, actually, with several students always laughing at themselves for what they pledged to do on the first day.

I also show an episode of *The Twilight Zone* from the 80s called ‘Wordplay.’ It’s about a man who experiences a situation where the English language radically changes over the course of one day. People are speaking gibberish and understanding each other, but he’s completely isolated. I always include a writing prompt with that activity, because it really gets some students thinking. I’ve especially had tremendous success with this prompt with my international students, as many of them can really relate to being in a situation where people don’t understand you and you can’t understand them.

These informal writing occurs with more frequency, and while students do not receive feedback with them as they do on the formal writing assignments, it is still writing practice for them.

**Student input.** Student stakeholders left a total of 74 comments about the writing components of the class. Of these, only four (at 5.4%) were coded negative, with the remaining 70 comments (94.6%) as positive. Even these four negative comments were not wholly negative. One student commented about a distaste in the structure of the writing assignment. “I just thought it was weird only doing sections at a time.” Another said that the professors should “maybe have the research paper be a little more challenging.” One student felt that the formal writing should have included more time devoted to teaching how to actually find research articles.

I would have liked to receive more help as to how to find sources when writing a research paper. Now that I am close to graduating and have taken upper level courses, finding sources to support our research is still a struggle and it is also a

struggle for many other students as well. I do not think very many professors take the time to show us and just assume we already know how when we don't. The final negatively coded comment on writing simply said, "I forgot APA and I had to write MLA."

When student stakeholders were asked about any aspects of the class that changed them as learners, many cited the writing in LTCY 101. "I have definitely improved in my writing. It used to be a struggle to get my thoughts together. Now, I feel a lot more confident when writing papers in other courses." "My writing skills have improved tremendously!" "I learned APA format very well through this class." One student stated that the aspect of class that changed him the most as a learner was "learning how to properly write a research paper, what sources can be used in a research paper, and how to go about finding these sources."

Numerous students emphasized the impact learning to write a formal academic paper had on their other college classes.

I think now, I feel a lot more comfortable and confident about writing a well formatted research paper. Taking this course really helped me learn how to proficiently do so. It is not so much of struggle as it was while taking this course. This type of comment was not an isolated event. Some students emphasized that writing papers was not a skill they learned prior to LTCY 101. "This course did indeed help me learn how to write a professional paper, something I didn't really learn how to do in high school." "I came in to college not knowing how to write a true research paper, and this class broke it down to really show me how to do so and succeed in writing a research paper." "It prepared me for a higher level of college writing."

Some students also emphasized the role that their former LTCY 101 course still have on their writing in their present classes. One student, citing both her LTCY 101 instructor and another LTCY 101 who has helped her with proofreading papers, stated,

[Instructor Two] taught how to write research papers and let us know we could always come to her for extra help. [Another instructor] remains instrumental to my success in writing my papers all through my graduate degree. Together with [Instructor Two], they were never too tired to correct and instruct.

Having access to other LTCY 101 faculty members is also an auxiliary support available to all former students through the Center for Literacy. Comments on writing feedback were made by several students. “The professors were also very helpful and were always there to assist in any way possible. They were great at giving feedback, good or bad.” “Writing papers was helpful because we got a lot of good feedback and things that would help us in our following classes.”

Students clearly appreciated the writing aspect of the class, with the majority of the comments overwhelmingly positive. “Writing papers are a breeze now!” “I was taught to write strong, professional research papers.” “The bulk of the work done in college revolves around research papers and professional writing. Having knowledge on how to go about that has really helped me. I am definitely better than I was when I joined college.” One student even acknowledged that writing would help her in her career hunt. “Writing papers prepares you for resumes.”

### **Formal Presentations**

Students experience the speaking component of literacy through formal presentations. The individual instructors may vary slightly in how their students give

presentations, but all LTCY 101 students give two presentations during the course.

The instructors stated that they believe the formal presentations may have the greatest impact on students. Instructor Two said,

I thought the presentations were a huge thing. I thought I did a good job with them, but I found that students, they wished we'd done more. So I guess that would be impactful; maybe the students did find that impactful. I guess we should be doing more of that. But they asked to do more. They want to feel more comfortable and I think that is significant. But on the other side, I feel like I need to provide better instruction of that. So I think, in our course, we don't – we just let them do it. I don't actually teach it because it's not a communications class. But I recently gave my end-of-the-year survey, and out of almost all the comments yesterday, several of them said, 'I wish we'd done more presentations.' One of them is do you feel confident doing a presentation and many of them felt they'd grown a little bit, but maybe if we'd done a few more they would have been more confident in it. So I think that's probably a place that we could make some improvements.

Instructor One agreed, saying,

First of all, public speaking as a huge fear universally is almost only ever overcome by continually getting up and speaking in front of people. This class has a unique vibe to it when you shut the door. The first couple weeks are probably the same as every other class, but when students really get involved, it's not a lecture class. There are lots of interactions and there are lots of opportunities for group work. There are lots of 'fun' types of things that almost



make it sound like elementary, but it's not. It's fundamentally different than other courses and I think students quickly get comfortable in the class. They know the other people in the class. They enjoy coming to the class and when you know you're going to have to get better at public speaking because you're worried about it, and then you actually publicly speak, even without instruction, you speak twice, in fact, and it wasn't as terrifying as it is in other classes... You think if I've got to get more practice, it needs to be in this class, because I'm comfortable in this class and they probably wouldn't say that in other classes that they're a little less comfortable in. They recognize that they need to do it more so they might as well do it here.

This is a testament to the unique format of LTCY 101, in that students actually request additional opportunities for work to improve upon vital skills.

When asked about how presentations and speeches are utilized in the class, Instructor Two remarked,

I would say in the beginning we build a... not like a climate... that sounds silly, but just a friendly classroom community. It starts in the beginning with the 'All about Me' speech, and everybody gets to know each other. I try to set the tone immediately that it's not appropriate to roll the eyes when someone is an over-engaged participant in class and to let them know this is why we're all here, we're all here to learn from each other, so be respectful of one another and I think we set the tone really early on.

Instructor One continued,

We all model what a presentation should look like for our students, so when we assign them, we make sure they know what a good presentation looks like, how long it should be, how engaged we are when presenting... We also have a rubric we go over with them. I also grade on progress. If a student makes progress from one presentation to the next, then I will make sure their grade reflects that. We give feedback, in depth, after each presentation, including what we want to see them improve for their next speech.

Although the instructors do not spend considerable class time on teaching any communications content, they do nonetheless provide support for students, just as they do with all other LTCY 101 activities.

**Student input.** Students had many comments to share about the formal presentations. Of the 48 comments given about presentations, nine at 18.75% were coded negatively with the remaining 39 at 81.25% coded positively. As stated by Instructor Two, many students' comments were similar and expressed a desire for more presentations. One student recommended more presentations "because I still am not comfortable speaking." Another student said, "One thing I would change would be more speaking in front of other students during class." Of course, some students also stated they wished for fewer presentations due to the stress caused by it. "I know it is important to practice speaking in front of others, but I hate speaking in front of people." "The presentations really stressed me out." "I do not like talking in front of people." "It was a challenge to get out of my comfort zone and speak in front of the class."

Several students ascribed the instructors' support as key to helping them overcome their fear of public speaking. "When I was a freshman and I took this class, I

was afraid of making presentations in front of my classmates. But this teacher was so nice and helpful, it helped me overcome the stage fright.”

Students also indicated how the formal presentations of LTCY 101 helped them in other coursework. “Presentations are very important for me, mainly because I am a business major. I will use this in my job more than any other thing from the course.”

One student said,

Having to do speeches in this small class was a good warm up for the public speaking class that I took the following semester. I had already had a little exposure to it and it was good to get that under my belt before going into public speaking.

Other students said things such as “presentations are required in almost every college major. The speaking and presenting of information that I researched in LTCY 101 provided me with public speaking skills and confidence in doing so.” “Learning basic public speaking skills and learning to improve them through the span of the class improved my public speaking more than I could ever explain.” Although LTCY 101 has only two presentations per semester, this component of the course nonetheless has a significant impact on students.

### **Motivation and Responsibility**

The remaining two curricular core competencies do not directly manifest in classroom activities but nonetheless play a key component in the daily operation of LTCY 101. Instructor One described the learning environment of the LTCY 101 classroom.

I'm going to bring the psychological aspect to it, so for me I think the first thing is all humans need structure and they need to know what you want so they can stay within the bounds of what you want because they want to please you. So we, as instructors, we're saying I'm going to teach you – because no one ever has – how to study, how to take notes, how to read, and then there needs to be some sort of device to deliver this structure for how to do that. They want something almost prescriptive to follow because, honestly, 18-year-old underprepared freshmen often aren't ready to be responsible just yet. Mentally, they're not ready for us to just describe it to them in theory and then go execute. They need something that has bounds to it so they can stay within those lanes to get wherever we're going with them. I, and I know the other instructors do, too, try to keep my classroom motivational, but more than anything, I want my students to be responsible adults, responsible learners.

Instructor Two readily agreed, nodding and saying,

I think they need to be more self-sufficient. I think we've seen a big decline in their own sense of accountability to their own education and I don't know if that's just a change overall in public education or what it is or a parenting style. But I feel like the groups in recent past are just not as – they don't feel that sense of responsibility. As a student, myself, I would have that horrible feeling if I'd walked into a classroom and not had the assignment done. I don't see that in a lot of my students anymore. They come in and they will full out admit, 'Oh, I read the red book for today. I didn't read anything else for today.' They don't – they're not even embarrassed that they're not following along, that they're not

understanding the calendar, and they ask questions that they think are – what I would consider to be inappropriate and almost a detriment of what people would think of me. And they don't seem to have that. They don't seem to have that sense of 'I want to be the best me that I can.' I don't know why.

This was clearly an important topic for the two faculty members, as they immediately and without hesitation engaged in a conversation about the role motivation and responsibility plays in LTCY 101. Instructor One continued,

I think part of it is a mindset that I've seen in students and it's changed or worsened over the past few years and that is I think a lot of students would confirm that they view college as obligatory. They don't view coming to college as a very expensive opportunity. They view it as 'Well, this is just my next year of school. So every single year of my entire life when I got done with school in May or June, I was off for the summer and then I came back in August and I didn't want to be here then and I had to do stupid things that my teachers made me do and I didn't see the purpose of this and I just have to get through it' and what we've done for most of these students in college is now the exact same thing.

They take the summer off, they come here, they're all the same age, and a lot of their peers, if not their friends, are in the same course. They sit down in a classroom with a teacher in front of them who says the same types of things that they've always heard and they never get out of the mindset that they've lived in for twelve years of public education to say, 'It's obligatory, I have to do this so let's suffer through it.'

And when you have that mindset, why would you care if you weren't prepared, so what's making you do it? I wouldn't be embarrassed if someone was making me do something and I didn't do it. I would be embarrassed if I was paying a lot of money to have the opportunity to do and then I just failed to do it. The absurdity of that is hard for me to calculate that in my head. They don't feel that, because I don't think that's how they view it. I'm putting words in their mouth, but that's my perspective.

Both instructors were extremely animated and passionate as they discussed this issue.

**Instructor role.** The instructors also shared their thoughts on the role the instructor can play in assisting students with motivation and responsibility. Instructor One said,

I talk to my students about this all the time - if your frontal lobe is not fully developed until you are 25 or 26 and part of the prefrontal cortex and the frontal lobe is to make decisions about the future in the present and that's not fully developed and you have this bad attitude or even this unmalleable personality where the people around you are going to dictate what you do instead of you dictate yourself, then you're more likely to make bad decision in the present and then realize your bad decision later in life.

The way around that is the students have to trust a person who is giving them advice and telling them things and just say, 'Even though I have a hard time doing that myself, I'm just going to trust that you know what you're talking about and I'm going to believe you.' And because we care, because we build those relationships with them, they trust us. That's why they come back. As soon as

we have that trust, then you have a way to circumvent their lack of anatomical maturity in their brain and say, ‘Now that you trust me, here is what you need to do. You need to do this, this, this, and this.’ And if they trust you and do those things, then they’ll be more successful. If they have the ability to do those things by themselves I think we’d fix a lot of these problems. If students could say, ‘In the present, I don’t care if my friends are going out on Thursday night, I have to study’ and they can control themselves because they knew the impact of that in the future, we wouldn’t have a lot of the problems that we have. So, how do we get past that? They trust us and then we tell them that and they just do it.

Instructor Two continued, “We’ve seen a change in our students over the years, and this has caused me to change many of the articles I use. Now I talk about grit, self-discipline, time-management, motivation... It’s all vital.”

Instructor One added,

And I know our students appreciate it, because they often say, ‘Thank you, just tell me the truth. I don’t want you to tell me what I want to hear. I want you to tell me the truth because I do deserve it – I’m an adult and I deserve for someone else to speak to me like an adult and just tell me the truth to prepare me for the world, not to coddle me through and tell me what I want to hear.’ So it’s probably a unique environment, at least for our class, compared to some other classes.

This theme of LTCY 101 being significantly different from other freshmen courses comes up consistently in both faculty and stakeholder comments.

**Student successes.** The instructors also have considerable experience with witnessing student successes in LTCY 101. Instructor Two said,

For me, it's been seeing those students come back in my other courses that I teach. So, for me it's being able to see them after. So, I've had several of them in my Literacy 320 class or my Literacy 420 class or in Block classes and to be able to see them be responsible, motivated, and successful student. Knowing where they started I think is really neat. I have one student coming up in a class this fall that I had in 101 and it's nice to see that they're still here and they've been successful. When we can see them come to us as inexperienced freshmen and we see them later as mature, responsible upperclassmen or even graduate students, that's a great success.

Instructor One agreed. "We know we are successful if we see them demonstrate personal responsibility, and one way that I can guarantee that has happened is if they are still here as a successful upperclassman or walk the line at graduation."

**Student input.** Students also had several comments about motivation and responsibility. They recognized it as a key component of the LTCY 101 course, and while only 25 comments were specifically made about this core competency, 100% of the comments were entirely positive.

A common trend in the comments was for students to emphasize how unmotivated or irresponsible they were as college freshmen and the role LTCY 101 played in helping them change. One student shared,

Taking this course helped in a lot of ways but mostly with the transition from high school. It helped me with new learning strategies that I can use in college to and go further in my education. This class gave me the motivation I needed not only to better in LTCY 101 but in all of my other classes as well. It was a great class to



take my first semester in college just coming back from summer and it got me back into the swing of things.

One student said, “It helped me understand why it is important to be in school and not just a statistic.” “It has made me more motivated to work harder in many of my classes.”

One individual even credited LTCY 101 with increasing his leadership skills. “It has forced me to take on leadership position in and outside of class.”

Several students emphasized that, regardless of the role the reading strategies or writing assignments assisted them, motivation and responsibility was still extremely important for them. “The element that was the most important to me was motivation, because that is what I lack.” “I learned so much about motivation and work ethic in this class that it has really helped me in college.” “After taking this class, I started to study more because I felt more of a responsibility to. I realized that college was not anything like high school, so I had to learn to do something to help me.” “It gave me not only the motivation but also the confidence to do better in my studies.” Many students were clearly motivated to become better students because of LTCY 101.

### **Work Ethic and Habit Building**

Related to the intrinsic qualities of motivation and responsibility are the final of the curricular core competencies, work ethic and habit building. Instructor Two addressed the appearance this competency takes in the course.

Every semester at the end, we have students tell us they think everything got easier. I told them yesterday, ‘Class didn’t get easier, the articles didn’t get easier, you actually got better at knowing how to read information and remember it. Your quiz grades should have gone up, you should be doing better.’ Of

course, all of that is getting used to doing the work, which is harder for some students than others.

Instructor One said,

Work ethic and habit building are very closely related. I mean, geeze, in 15 weeks you can build a habit. So, even if nobody else in their other three or four courses they are taking during that semester, if nobody else is trying to instill a work ethic and good work habits in them, at least they can get it from our class.

And we say every single week, you have to read this, do this, turn this in. You do those three things just for that one assignment 15 straight weeks, and then the student who comes back to you and says 'My second semester was so much easier than my first.' No, it wasn't, you had built the habits. The quizzes didn't get easier at the end of the semester, you got used to that workload and that work ethic and timing it and figuring out your schedule management and all these things to figure out how you can get through it. And hopefully by the end of 15 weeks, if we've instilled in you a habit, it will carry on. Because habits are hard to build, but they are not terribly easy to break. So if they carry that on then, you know, that hopefully continues.

The researcher asked for more examples of how habit building works in the class, and

Instructor Two stated,

I think we put a lot of supports into place for that. I mean, like I said, our policies, the fact that – the way we teach everything in steps, make them accountable for everything and remind them how to do things. In the beginning, I'm very clear and say, 'Here, I'll send you an email and remind you of things.

I'll remind you how to use the calendar,' but then we sort of wean them off, and by the end, they get it.

This harkens back to the role of responsibility and motivation in student success.

When asked about the role of work ethic in helping students achieve success, Instructor One said,

I will say something different instead of just repeating my concurrence with that and that is, at least in my class and people who know would not be surprised by this, but there is no BS, no patronizing, there's no 'Well, that was close and that was pretty good.' No, if it's not right, it's not right. I want my students to understand that this is all about building their work ethic.

In college, and in life, you don't need to just say something and if it's just completely off-the-wall incorrect, then people are not going to reward you or fail to punish you in a job. I mean, if you can't deliver and you're not correct, that's just not what's going to happen, and so I speak to them very plainly about all the things that we do and why we do them.

I'll say something the first day of class and it's just like they physically react because they can't believe I just said it because they are so used to people just saying fluff that doesn't mean anything. When people do, that people don't even listen to you anymore. They just kind of zone-out or tune-out, and at the beginning, that's how they react, but by a few weeks into the semester they appreciate it.

**Student input.** As can be seen in Table 6, students did not have a strong preference for work ethic and habit building. This was the category with the fewest

comments at 22, although motivation and responsibility was close at 25. However, all of the 22 comments were positive.

Some students directly stated that LTCY 101 positively impacted them. “I improved my writing and my work ethic.” “It has encouraged me to do more work.” One student remarked on the role that the in-class reading assignments had on their work ethic. “I learned from the readings and papers we had to do that it is important to work hard and always do your best to be successful.”

As with the other curricular core competencies, some students identified how work ethic and habit building impacted them in other classes. “Walking out of this course as a freshman gave me a good work ethic which has helped me succeed in all my classes.” Although intangible, some students clearly identified work ethic and habit building as a crucial component of their collegiate success.

### **Transformational Learning**

While LTCY 101 is structured around the previously discussed six curricular core competencies, there are several other aspects of the course that students and faculty alike found significant. In the open-ended questions of the student interviews, students shared many topics that they found were critically important for their transformational learning process.

### **Camaraderie**

Instructor One shared some thoughts on some non-literacy aspects of the class that he felt made it successful.

We definitely have a team atmosphere among those of us who teach LTCY 101, and I know that is vital. I think that opens us up for a free exchange of ideas and

we try everything out because we always know, hey, next semester if that didn't work, we can alter it. It's not written in stone. Let's try it, see what it looks like. That's ultimately good for us and, more importantly, for the students.

Instructor Two added,

As for the team atmosphere, we're very comfortable with each other. If I suggest an activity for the class, I want one of my colleagues to be honest with me and say, 'I don't think that's going to work.' Just like we said, we don't mess around with our students, we say it exactly like it is. And I think we tell each other the same thing, you know, and therefore we can try out new ideas and help each other come up with the best thing for students. Even though we all do things differently, I think we're all doing things also the same. The camaraderie those of us who teach the course share definitely makes us successful, and I believe that trickles down to the students and makes them more successful.

Given the easy banter and discussion these two faculty stakeholders shared during their interview, the camaraderie is easy to see.

When the students were asked about the most positive aspect of LTCY 101, several responded that the camaraderie atmosphere of the class was significant for them. One student appreciated "seeing that I wasn't the only student struggling with my reading abilities."

Three students cited meeting new friends in LTCY 101.

I really enjoyed LTCY 101 as a freshman. It allowed me to speak up in class which led to making friends who were also taking the class. I would have to say this one of the best classes I have taken by far.

One of these students even had a rather unusual positive change from the friendship she found in LTCY 101. “I feel like I was supposed to be in the class. I actually met a friend through this class and she introduced me to my husband-to-be, so I wouldn't change a thing. God is good!”

### **Confidence**

With academic success come confidence, and six students shared confidence as the answer to the question, “Has any aspect of this course changed you as a learner/student?”

One student said, “I’m able to retain more when I read. LTCY 101 gave me academic confidence.” Others replied, “I have more confidence in my school work,” and “I am more confident in my research work.” Two students cited the formal presentations in class as specific examples of class activities that helped grow their confidence.

### **Critical Thinking**

The task of thinking critically is vital for all college students. Although only four students cited critical thinking specifically as a key component of the LTCY 101 experience for them, these four students clearly felt the course had a significant impact on their success. Other students also cited the skillset learned in LTCY 101 as an important factor in their overall academic success.

One student said,

It has helped me evolve as a student and as a learner. This course helped me understand critical thinking and difficult problem solving a lot more than before I was introduced into the course. I also grew a passion for reading and writing while taking this course.

Another student remarked that LTCY 101 helped them “progress in my ability to look deeper than the surface and better understand what I am learning.” “I actually got a lot of benefits from LTCY 101 last semester. It improved my writing, my thinking, and my speaking.” The final comment about critical thinking emphasized that LTCY 101 taught him how to learn. “This class did change me as a learner and I now know different ways that I learn best and that your teachers do want you to be successful.”

### **Shame**

Although LTCY 101 is not a developmental class but a literacy intervention class, there were still some students who acknowledge they felt a shame or stigma associated with the class. One lengthy comment stated,

I would change the way the class is presented to students when they first take it.

To me, I felt like lesser of a student because of my reason for taking it (as well as most other students in my class). My reason for taking it was because I did not score high enough on the reading portion of the ACT. Because of this, I was forced to take this course. I'm not arguing that I didn't need this class, but I am saying I felt dumb compared to my floor-mates who did not have to take it because of the way I was told I needed to take it.

One student resented “having to tell people that I was in a remedial class.” Another said he “felt a little ‘ignorant’ because it was required of me to take the course.”

### **Negative Feedback**

In addition to the positive feedback, some negative comments were also shared. Some students did not complain about the course but about their fellow students.

Being one of the only students in my class who tried and complied with the teachers requests. There were students in there (for the same reason I was) who didn't think they needed the class so they goofed off the entire time and made it hard for students like me who wanted to learn.

Another student shared this sentiment, saying,

Many of the students that were in there did not want to be, but they were required to take it. Their attitude rubbed off on me and a couple other students – but it had nothing to do with the course or how it was being taught.

One student offered a suggestion for how to improve this component of the course. “I would separate people from who want to be in the course from people who don’t. It was really discouraging.”

Other criticisms of the course lay with the course material itself. “It seemed repetitive and remedial at times.” One student even wished for the course to be “a little more challenging. It is more motivating to be challenged.” Another cited the busy nature of the course. “From having chapters to read in the book to vocabulary to the reading guides. For first semester college students, we were asked for a lot.” Two students stated that they felt the class was boring.

One student comment was still negative but with a personal albeit minor positive twist. “I wouldn’t recommend the class to anyone who doesn’t need it. But I’m glad I took it.”

### **Positivity**

The number of positive comments far outweighed the bad. When asked what they would change about the course if they could, 39 students said they would not change a



thing. One student said LTCY 101 “made me strive to do better.”

For some students, the impacts of LTCY 101 can be felt beyond the course itself. “I think all six of the elements helped me grow as a reader and a writer. I have put almost every skill to use in the last semester and I owe it all to that class!”

When these students were asked about the six elements of the course, some used the opportunity to give advice for potential future students of LTCY 101. “It’s a good class. It might be hard in the beginning because of a lot of reading, but wait until you are used to it and follow what the professor said and you will be fine!” “I got an A in the class. Just go in there and handle business.”

Although this information was not collected from students, the faculty stakeholders shared some of the positive feedback they have heard from students.

Instructor One said,

This is not solicited at all, but students will email and say ‘I want to say to you this is the best class I’ve had my entire freshman year and I’m already recommending it to all my friends.’ We also solicit feedback on an anonymous survey and students will respond to that and consistently, overwhelmingly, students say ‘I’m not upset that I have to take the course, I’m glad I took the course, and I would recommend it to my friends to take of their own volition.’

They see its utility and I think that speaks volumes when the most common thing we see and observe and hear students saying about their courses that they’re directed to take is ‘I don’t see why I’m taking this course. I don’t understand why I have to do this if I’m this such and such major’ and for students who – on their own, unsolicited – comes to us and say, ‘Wow, I think everybody needs to take

this course,' I think that speaks volumes on how they see it in terms of its utility for them.

Indeed, several students, when asked on about their overall thoughts of LTCY 101, made similar sentiments. "It is a beneficial class and I would recommend it to anyone." "I would highly recommend LTCY 101 to incoming freshman." "I liked the course and I wish I could go back and look through what I learned as a refresher to help me now during school." "The course is designed with a purpose. Anyone who follows instructions closely and utilizes the lessons from this course will do well academically in their future."

Still others said they thought LTCY 101 should be mandated for all students. "Every freshman needs this class." "Every freshman should be required to take it." "My overall thoughts are that each students that steps on this campus should be required to take this course because it is very helpful and will be useful in the future." "I would like to see it as a mandatory course for all freshmen in order to help them succeed in college."

One student described how, even though he wasn't supposed to be in the course, he ultimately ended up taking the course and found himself a better student for it.

At first I was upset that I had to take this class because I scored high enough on my ACT, but once I had my scores updated, I was able to drop the class, but at that point, I had really started enjoying that class and that should say a lot.

These positive comments are just a representative sampling of the student responses.

### **Instructor Support**

Of the four instructors who have taught this course, three have taught the course most frequently in the past four years. These three instructors all had specific comments

from students addressing them by name, all positively. No negative instructor feedback was given by student stakeholders. Of 50 comments that specifically mentioned instructor support, twenty-seven comments, at 54%, gave a specific instructor name. The remaining 46% of positive feedback about instructors did not state a specific instructor name.

Some of the feedback which did not list a name still praised the instructor's role in the class. "My instructor did a fantastic job teaching this class!" "Best professor I've ever had!" "The professor made the learning fun."

The comments about the instructors were varied but all contained positive statements about the instructors. The following comments are arranged in no particular order.

- [Instructor] was an awesome teacher. I learned a lot from her!
- I felt like this course helped me get into the groove of college. I've already used many of the tools that [Instructor] gave me last semester!
- I think this course helped me a lot as a student and I would like to say thank you to [Instructor] for everything you have done for me.
- The devotion of [Instructor] to teach in a way that the class could learn and how she would welcome any questions or concerns that students had was the most positive aspect of LTCY 101.
- [Instructor] did a wonderful job and was very professional in teaching the class and helping his students understand what he is instructing.
- [Instructor] always motivated us to do our best.
- [Instructor] was not only a professor but a life coach.

- [Instructor] always kept a positive energy in the room, but at the same time, he reminded us frequently that we did not have to be in there (a select few students had a sour attitude) and that the class could only improve our learning. I really respect how he was completely honest with us but also valued our hard work and made class fun. Everything that I learned in that class, I have taken with me to all of my other classes.
- It is a great course and I would call [Instructor] a friendly guy that really cares about students that are normally seen as ‘bad’ or ‘trouble makers.’ I respect [Instructor] for that.
- [Instructor] was an extraordinary teacher, and he really engaged his students in the course.
- [Instructor] is an awesome professor and probably one of the nicest people I have ever met.
- The most positive aspect of class was the fun, no bullshit environment. Everyone was thought of as adults and that made us respect each other and [Instructor]. Everyone knew that if you didn't want to come, you didn't have to, and we all knew that we would receive the grade that we worked for. That made us all actually feel like we were doing something important in the class.

Based upon the feedback about instructors, it seems that some students feel very strongly about the role their instructor played in their education.

### **Summary**

The literacy intervention course at the heart of this study, LTCY 101 as it is referred to in this study, was created to address the need for students with a reading score

on the ACT that indicated intervention was required for academic success in college. Faculty at the regional, southeastern university of this study created LTCY 101 to address the state mandate to reduce remediation rates.

This study followed the portraiture paradigm in “drawing a picture” of the experiences of faculty stakeholders and student stakeholders of a literacy intervention course that has demonstrated effectiveness. Three faculty stakeholders were interviewed, one in regard to course creation and two about course operation, and 712 former students, representing the entire population of the literacy intervention course still enrolled from Fall 2012 to Fall 2015 semesters, were contacted about completing a survey of the course. Of these 712 students, 206 students participated in the survey. The interview questions and student survey can be found in Appendices A through C. All stakeholders were asked questions that were designed with the research questions of this study in mind. Student stakeholder data were collected anonymously. The researcher has taken all steps to maintain confidentiality of all stakeholder identities.

The faculty interviews were recorded and transcribed. Student responses were obtained from Qualtrics. All open-ended responses and the transcriptions were coded with NVivo with the conceptual framework of the course, curricular core competencies, and elements of transformational learning in mind. In this chapter, data from this coding process were included to paint a “portrait” of stakeholder experiences regarding the literacy intervention course (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The faculty stakeholders provided a description of the process in which the course was created and how the course operates in its current form. The six curricular core

competencies were examined from the perspectives of both faculty members and students. Students and faculty shared multiple insights which are summarized below:

1. Reading guides and reading strategies are identified by both students and faculty as one of the most important components of the class. Although LTCY 101 is a class without a specific content, the reading guides and reading strategies are utilized to teach students specific strategies that can be employed in other classes. Students cited multiple examples of the reading strategies being useful to them in their other academic coursework.
2. Book club and class discussions were more strongly identified by faculty as more potentially useful than by students. Instructors believe that the skills learned in book club will be applicable to students later in their undergraduate coursework. Students rated this competency as the least impactful, although some students still had positive statements about it.
3. Academic writing is useful for students in teaching them the strategies for conducting academic research and completing a formal research paper. In addition, instructors utilize informal writing activities in class. For many students, LTCY 101 offers their first exposure to academic writing and research, a skill that students quickly recognize is needed in many college classes.
4. Formal presentations were identified by instructors as the competency that many students cite as beneficial for them. Students also reported that the strategies taught in conducting formal presentations had many applications for them beyond LTCY 101.

5. Motivation and responsibility was acknowledged by instructors as a key role in student success. The instructors believe that a unique feature of LTCY 101 is the role that they can play in assisting students in developing a sense of responsibility. Multiple student comments also made this claim.
6. Work ethic and habit building was the one competency of the six that students did not demonstrate a preference for on the survey as shown by the Chi-square test. However, despite this, some students still stated in the open-response items of the survey that a key feature of LTCY 101 was its role in helping them to develop a strong work ethic.

In addition, the experiences of participating in LTCY 101 that do not fall into the six curricular core competencies were also examined, further explained below and listed in order they were presented in this chapter. These elements helped to craft the story of the transformational learning experiences of student stakeholders. Some of the data reported described the changes students experienced, a key component of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2003). These data combined create an overall narrative of LTCY 101 from the dual perspective of faculty and students.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe the conceptualization and implementation of a literacy intervention course and to examine and describe the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of both faculty and student stakeholders involved with a literacy intervention course. Three distinct groupings of stakeholders were found in the interview and survey data collected; the first are those stakeholders involved in course creation, the second group are those who teach the course on a regular basis, and the final group are the students who take the course. All have unique perspectives about the course that, when combined; help to craft the overall narrative of the literacy intervention course from its conception to implementation to current format and delivery. This chapter gives an overview of the results; implications for course creation, administrators, instructors, and expansion opportunities; a short look at the methodological limitations of this study; and provides recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion of Findings**

As has been previously stated, the efficacy of this credit-bearing literacy intervention course on student retention status and cumulative GPA has already been established (Super, 2016). Four research questions guided the structure of the present study. Each of the previously discussed three populations was crucial in answering the four questions. Course creator interview was the primary source of information for RQ1. Information for RQ2 was found from all faculty stakeholders, including course creator and current course instructors. RQ3 was answered by both current course faculty and student stakeholders, while RQ4 was answered with information obtained directly from



students. Using the qualitative method of portraiture, coupled with some descriptive statistics and Chi-squared test, the curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course and their role in impacting student success were identified. The researcher also utilized portraiture as a lens to make sense of the data to find the answers for the other research questions. In chapter four, the researcher provided the results of the faculty stakeholder interviews and student surveys. These interviews and surveys were coded, using the six curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course and the theory of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2003; Merriam, 2004) as the basis for the nodes used.

### **Research Question One**

*What was the conceptual framework on which the literacy intervention course was conceptualized and developed?*

Vygotsky's theory of Proximal Development is intricately tied into the concept of growth mindset. The theory of the Zone of Proximal Development states that individuals have academic functions or skills that are nascent but growing and that exposure to increasingly more difficult skills, scaffolded with support, will help these individuals mature their academic prowess (Vygotsky, 1978). Psychologist Carol Dweck (2006) discussed the concept of growth mindset as the belief that one can change and improve abilities, including academic strengths, with practice and effort.

The traditional remedial education model consists of having students practice the basic skills that test scores indicate they may lack (Cooper, 2014). LTCY 101 instead utilizes an approach that uses best practices in andragogical literacy instruction in real-world settings to provide literacy intervention with students rather than remediate them.

Rather than have students drop to a lower curriculum, a literacy intervention course offers intentional instruction on specific targeted skills at a higher level than the student currently presents.

The interview with the faculty member who designed the course illuminated all of these issues as components upon which she designed the LTCY 101 course proposal and curriculum. Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, coupled with growth mindset, form the conceptual and theoretical framework upon which LTCY 101 was built. The course was designed to challenge students at their current educational level. Student learning is scaffolded to help students achieve academic success. The curriculum does not "dumb down" for the students; the students must reach up to the expected level of academic fluency. The implications of this course design are discussed with the next research question.

### **Research Question Two**

*How did the theoretical framework manifest in the curricular core competencies of the course?*

With Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and a growth mindset being the conceptual and theoretical framework upon which LTCY 101 was created, the next logical step is to examine the specific class activities and determine how this framework is manifested in the daily operation of the class. The actual practice of the class is embodied in the framework, with students regularly being stretched to new academic limits and supported as they read and write above current grade level equivalency as determined by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. The curricular core competencies, the six driving elements of LTCY 101, are easily embedded within the framework of the

course. The six curricular core competencies of LTCY 101 manifest in several class activities:

1. Reading guides and reading strategies are the most frequently utilized of the competencies, giving students access to texts that they may otherwise struggle with;
2. Book club and book club discussions are a model by which instructors can emulate the types of class discussions students will experience in upper level coursework;
3. Academic writing and research is a scaffolded approach to writing whereby instructors teach the individual components of writing a formal research paper;
4. Formal presentations are used to prepare students for public speaking and presentations, a skill used in many other undergraduate courses;
5. Responsibility and motivation are not inherently class activities but are modeled by the instructors and used to help students build and create intrinsic qualities that will lead to academic success; and
6. Work ethic and habit building are modeled in all class components, designed to prepare students for the ongoing rigor of academic coursework.

LTCY 101's theoretical framework is manifested in the reading guides and reading strategies of the course primarily as this competency is a prime example of the use of scaffolding to support underprepared and under-practiced readers. The students in LTCY 101 do not receive reading assignments that match their grade level equivalency as noted by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test; they are given reading assignments that are aligned with a college freshman reading level and they are provided supports in the form

of reading strategies to help them quickly acclimate to the more difficult reading material. The reading does not “dip down” to the students; they are given the support and structure needed to help them quickly “level up.”

The book clubs work in a similar fashion. The books are appropriate for usage in a typical college freshman classroom. In addition to the reading strategies provided in class, the class discussion is another scaffolded support to assist students in quickly acquiring the skills needed to participate in college-level class discussions.

The academic writing and research component is aligned with Vygotsky’s belief that learners, with assistance, progress from a skillset they cannot do, to a skillset they can do with guidance, to a skillset they can do unaided. This is very apparent in the structure of the formal research paper assignment in LTCY 101. Faculty first teach the very basic skills needed to conduct research, and as students progress through multiple drafts of the research paper, they receive decreasing amounts of faculty input and swiftly progress to writing a complete research paper without teacher assistance. The main objective of the research paper is to have students reading, re-reading, analyzing, comparing, and providing synthesis of information in a carefully crafted argument in the form of a paper.

Although the formal presentation assignments in LTCY 101 do not occupy as much class time as academic reading and writing, this assignment also falls into neatly into Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. The teacher provides the framework for the presentation which the student emulates on a simple presentation. By the end of the semester, students have progressed to completing a unique formal presentation on their own. The core focus is to have students reading increasingly more complex print,

dissecting the critical information, and arranging it into a compelling argument in the form of an oral presentation.

The last two curricular core competencies, responsibility/motivation and work ethic/habit building, fall into the theoretical and conceptual framework of LTCY 101 in a slightly different manner. These are not skills or strategies that are part of the direct instruction of the course. Instead, these are modeled through class assignments, discussions, and learning activities. Rather than exist as strategies that are taught, these two competencies function as expectations from faculty members. However, these expectations still rest under the Zone of Proximal Development. While some students may come to class with these skills intact, for those who do not, they are nonetheless supported early in the semester and scaffolded supports in the form of guidance from the faculty members allow students to internalize these competencies. Greater modeling is provided earlier in the semester, and as the student grows, less and less modeling is needed until the student becomes a responsible, motivated learner with a strong academic work ethic.

### **Research Question Three**

*What curricular core competencies of the literacy intervention course impact student success as identified by stakeholder reporting?*

In examining the findings for this question, there are three different places from which data can be culled. The first is the Chi-square test conducted on the ranking of curricular core competencies in terms of success by student stakeholders. These data can be found in Table 6. Students reported five of the curricular core competencies as impactful on student success, with the exception of “Work Ethic & Habit Building”

which had a  $p$ -value of .209, indicating students do not have a strong preference for that competency. Out of the 182 students who responded to this item on the survey, the other five competencies were all ranked as preferential to some degree.

Faculty stakeholder interviews are another source of data. Although they are not the typical stakeholder expected when examining student success, as individuals who have taught the course for years, they certainly have a unique perspective to offer. Their perspective typically aligned with the data represented in both the quantitative data and student responses.

The faculty had the most to say about the impact of “Reading Strategies and Reading Guides” on student success. Specific reading strategies are chosen for specific purposes to best impact academic achievement. Success in college is dependent upon reading fluency and automaticity. Student stakeholders also echoed this sentiment, praising both the reading components of the course and the confidence LTCY 101 gave them in reading. This is also represented in the ranking data of Table 6, which indicates that more students rated “Reading Strategies and Reading Guides” as the most important in terms of success with the fewest number ranking it last.

“Book Club and Class Discussions” was not especially impactful as identified by students in term of success. More students ranked this competency as the least impactful by a large margin; 92 students said it was the least important. The next lowest ranking was 38 students who reported “Work Ethic and Habit Building” were not impactful. Faculty stakeholders agreed with the data that seem to indicate book club is not especially significant for students in the immediacy of course impact. The faculty acknowledged that they believe book club discussions are beneficial for student performance, especially

in upper level courses, but they also stated that this is something that students may not acknowledge or even realize for several semesters.

“Formal Presentations” was an interesting competency. Faculty stakeholders expressed surprise at how frequently students reported the benefits of the presentations. While students may not consider it the most important, it is still nonetheless ranked highly in terms of success by the student stakeholders. The majority of student responses ranked it in the top four of the six, with fewer than 18.7% ranking it as five or six. Students gave a variety of reasons for the importance of this competency, including its value as a real-world skill in both their future academic and professional careers.

Both faculty and student stakeholders heavily praised the role of “Academic Writing and Research” on student-perceived success. Faculty stakeholders stressed the importance of academic writing as this is a key skillset that is needed throughout one’s entire academic career. Students stressed the benefit this had on them as this was something they utilized numerous times in other courses.

“Motivation and Responsibility” is the last of the six curricular core competencies that was found to generate a preference among students. Only nine students out of 182, 4.9%, ranked it as the least important of the six in terms of success. Faculty stakeholders maintained that one of the things that make LTCY 101 students more successful than students in the traditional remedial model is the unique role of motivation and responsibility in the structure of the class. This strength is due in part to the relationships built between faculty and student stakeholders. This is also evident in the comments student stakeholders gave, both about “Motivation and Responsibility” and the role that faculty stakeholders had in motivating the class.

#### **Research Question Four**

*What transformational learning experiences do students report as a result of the literacy intervention course?*

Transformational learning is that which results in students experiencing a significant change in themselves as learners (Clark, 1993). When students undergo a transformational learning event, they also transform fixed assumptions about themselves. A student who has experienced transformational learning may suddenly see themselves as capable of completing a particular assignment when before, they had doubt. This can occur with small events, such as individual assignments, or large events, such as graduating college.

Clearly, not all students who took LTCY 101 report it as a transformational learning experience for themselves. This is evident in the few negative comments received. However, the majority of the comments received were positive and many are aligned with the elements of transformational learning.

Some students stated that the class itself transformed them. These students reported that the class was so impactful, they believed that all students should be required to take it. Others acknowledged wishing they could take the course again as a refresher. Some students were so motivated to become better students by the class that they recommend it to their friends.

Of the curricular core competencies, formal presentations, academic writing, and the reading strategies were especially touted as transformational by students. Regarding the reading guides and strategies, some students made such statements as the readings helped them “become more confident” and that they “shaped me into the college student I



am today.” Students cited the academic writing and research as a crucial skill that definitely helped them in other classes. The formal presentations were a competency that students frequently cited as immensely disliking but recognizing the importance of it.

Most interestingly, 50 students made comments that either directly or implicitly stated that their instructor may have played a role in their transformational learning experience of the course. Some students stated that their instructor was the most important component of the course for them; some gave the instructors credit for them even still being enrolled in college.

### **Implications of the Findings**

With the efficacy of the course established, the researcher of the present study sought to gather stakeholder stories to “draw a picture” of the complete course. This literacy intervention course, which exists to prepare students for the rigorous reading at the collegiate level, has several components that are worthy of greater examination and focus. The implication of the findings for course design, administrators, instructors, and expansion opportunities of the course are discussed below.

#### **Implications for Course Design**

The findings of the study show that Vygotsky’s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and a growth mindset are appropriate andragogical tools when designing a course of best practices in adult literacy. Both faculty stakeholders and the students themselves report that the scaffolded instructional techniques of the course are potential approaches for generating student progress.

The traditional remedial reading model is one of identifying student deficiencies and attempting to help students accumulate skills (Long & Boatman, 2013). Multiple

researchers have shown that merely enrolling in remedial education can have a negative impact upon a students' success (Clotfelter et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2015; NCSL, 2016). Students who took LTCY 101 are 1.85 times more likely to be retained at the two-year mark than students who took a developmental reading course (Super, 2016). For the institution of higher education that wants to assist students in graduation, increase retention numbers, and ensure student success, a literacy intervention course such as LTCY 101 may be beneficial in improving student retention and graduation rates. The course must be designed with best practices, including any potential changes that may occur in the field of literacy andragogy.

A successful literacy intervention course must be based around the acquisition of strategies rather than the accomplishment of skills (Afflerbach et al., 2008). This is also in alignment with best practices. Skills acquisition is an example of part-to-whole instruction, whereby students are assumed to eventually become strong readers by learning the disparate components of reading. Strategy practice is the development of a working plan. In the whole-to-part model of instruction, strategies occur with scaffolding student instruction with challenging texts and providing more supports. Skills practice is the usage of easier texts that gradually get more difficult over time. Best practices are clear that the strategy-based approach to instruction is the preferred method for teaching students.

A successful literacy intervention course must also utilize intervention techniques for student success rather than remediation. Research has shown that the traditional remedial model is less successful than an accelerated intervention model of instruction (Edgecombe, 2011). For the faculty member charged with designing a successful literacy

intervention course, an intervention technique using scaffolded instruction to help students quickly reach grade equivalency level with authentic grade-level texts will achieve greater success with students than the traditional remedial model of holding students back until the missing skills have been acquired.

ACT recently expanded its definition of college readiness to begin with students achieving a reading score of 22 on the ACT (ACT, 2013). When designing a literacy intervention course, students scoring 21 and below may benefit from successfully completing the course. To fail to serve students who are identified as in need of reading assistance is to do these students a grand disservice.

One recurring problem with the traditional remedial model of reading instruction in higher education is that the classes do not count accrue credit hours (Long & Boatman, 2013). Transitioning from a non-credit-bearing model to one that provides credits toward graduation is a major change that must occur at the university level in the establishment of any successful intervention course. A literacy intervention class will be viewed more positively with students if it is credit-bearing and serves to fulfill a graduation requirement.

### **Implications for Administrators**

Given the acknowledgement from students for the role that the LTCY 101 instructors played in their academic success, an administrator would be well served to consider hiring full-time credentialed instructors rather than utilizing adjunct instructors. The usage of adjunct instructors teaching developmental courses is the typical expectation for most universities, despite the fact that research shows students fare worse academically with adjuncts versus full-time instructors (Long & Boatman, 2013). It is a

cost-saving measure that ultimately does a disservice to students. Students are clearly better served when they have dedicated, full-time instructors to teach them.

In addition, adjunct faculty are typically available only to teach night courses. Due to the low pay adjunct faculty receive, they frequently teach other jobs during the day and are only available to teach on college campuses at night after their other job has ended. Research shows that college students who have classes earlier in the day perform better academically than those students who take classes with later start times (Onyper, Thatcher, Gilbert, & Gradess, 2012). With full-time faculty members, this can easily be avoided and the majority, if not the entirety, of the needed literacy intervention courses can be scheduled during day class times.

In addition, full-time faculty members are more available for student assistance. Faculty members providing student assistance is an invaluable component of a successful literacy intervention course. Adjunct instructors will typically only be available immediately before or after their class as they are not full-time faculty members. Staffing a literacy intervention course with anything other than full-time faculty is doing a grave disservice to students.

Interdepartmental collaboration should be encouraged across the entire campus. This can exist in a few different formats. The first is that the literacy intervention course would greatly benefit from consistent pairing with heavy reading content courses. Additionally, the instructors involved with the course should also be encouraged to have relationships with other agencies on campus. Enrollment management should be intimately involved with the literacy intervention course, as are any advising centers. The success of a literacy intervention course falls largely on the instructors, but there are

many other departments and services on campus that can be instrumental in making the course even more impactful and successful for students.

While money is always a sore issue for most institutions of higher education, a successful literacy intervention can play a role in generating income for a universe. This should in turn be used to shore up services for students in a literacy intervention course. Whether this funding comes from the institutional budget or external grants, many ancillary support services can be funded to great success with this population of students. Research clearly states that more engaged students are more likely to be retained and graduate (Price & Tovar, 2014).

Akin to this financial issue, the course needs to be offered on a sufficiently large scale that multiple populations of students are impacted. The university which offers a literacy intervention course but only some students who need said course are eligible to take it is losing out on significant tuition income, retention numbers, and graduation rates. If a course works, it should be offered to any and all students who need its services.

The last change may be viewed as a systemic change, but it needs to start from the administration. Remedial education clearly has a stigma associated with it (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002). While a literacy intervention course founded on best practices is not remedial reading, students or the campus community may perceive it as such. The stigma associated with remediation can be directly harmful to student retention rates. One avenue through which this stigma can be eliminated or reduced is clearly offering the class as credit-bearing and to allow it to count toward graduation.

### **Implications for Instructors**

For a literacy intervention course, the four components of literacy, reading,

writing, speaking, and listening, are obvious necessities. The present study shows that reading, writing, and speaking, in the form of formal presentations, are the most impactful on learning as identified by both faculty and students. Reading was the most identified as impactful of these three. While a literacy intervention course should include all four components, the heaviest weight should be given to the reading component.

Educational feedback on assessments and class assignments can occur in a variety of manners. It is important that instructors give valid, timely, and in-depth feedback to students. As the students in a literacy intervention course are a population that requires scaffolded instruction, it is tremendously important that feedback is one of the tools utilized to move students to the level of autonomous mastery.

In addition, instructors must ensure that they demand high level work. The literacy intervention course does not succeed by mandating work. The assignments of the course are not a checklist to completion. The course is successful because it teaches students strategies that they can then implement independently and in other settings. Akin to this, the strategies taught should be replicable in other courses on campus and in authentic, real-world settings.

The most significant implication for instructors is found in the statements made by students about the role of their instructors. Almost 25% of students stated that the instructor was one of the most powerful elements of the course for them in terms of their success. Instructors who can forge a relationship with their students, offer detailed feedback and guidance, provide support, and demand quality work from students are more likely to invoke a transformational learning experience in students. This collaborative environment in the classroom can have a positive impact on many students

in regards to success and retention (O’Keeffe, 2013). Instructors who support a collaborative team atmosphere within their class and encourage student engagement will likely experience greater success than other instructors.

This collaborative relationship needs to also be extended to other instructors. The faculty stakeholders stated that the collaborative atmosphere amongst those who teach the literacy intervention course is vital for success. It allows for instructors to try ideas out on each other before introducing it to their classes.

In addition, instructors should seek out avenues for growth and improvement. Professional development opportunities that are challenging are one potential source of this growth. Instructors cannot stagnate. There are many ways that instructors can ensure they remain at the forefront of their field. Advanced credentialing and other opportunities for growth should be explored at all possible opportunities. The more prepared the instructor, the more benefits he or she will offer to students.

The transformational learning experience itself is especially crucial for students. While instructors can only encourage such a change rather than create it, they can at least fashion the class and the atmosphere of the class in such a way as to foster transformational learning. This is not necessarily a small feat for an instructor; it requires diligence, attention, and above all, dedication to the course and, more importantly, the students.

Although literacy intervention is not remediation, some students may perceive it as such. An instructor would do well to serve class by avoiding any stigmatizing language. The role that the class plays toward graduation should be emphasized. Any academic shortcomings should not be acknowledged as weaknesses. Student perception

can have a large role in course success (Basic Skills Agency, 1997). Course aspects should deviate from the remedial model in both language and practice, utilizing strategy approaches over skills.

The student survey data from this survey indicate that instructor support is an extremely important aspect of the course for some students. Some believe that all college students should seek out and find a mentor during their early college years (Johnson, 2016). The instructor who engages in any type of mentor relationship with a student will assist the student in developing personal and academic skills that can impact the student long after the class is over. Such mentorship activities can also have a profound positive impact upon the instructor.

### **Implications for Expansion of the Literacy Intervention Course**

There is undeniable strength within this literacy intervention course. It has demonstrable efficacy in increasing retention and GPA. Qualitative data from students indicate the strengths that lie in the course include the quality instruction, the instructors teaching the course, and the strategies delivered to students to help them achieve success. However, for as phenomenal as a single course can be, it will ultimately be quite limiting in terms of success. A course exists for one semester, and while the strategies learned in the course can be applied elsewhere, the course is ultimately over at that point. However, there are many things that can be done to improve retention, graduation, and the student experience which is a driving force of the successful intervention. This section will describe the potential changes that a university could establish to better serve students.

The freshman year of college is vitally important. It sets the tone for the remainder of a student's collegiate career. Students either perform well and take off, or



as is slightly more likely, they will underperform and either drop out of college or else struggle for several years to recoup the damage done during one or two semesters. This problem can be fixed, although it will require a radical overhaul of the first year of college. While the literacy intervention course in this study was designed to meet the needs of students with reading scores below the level of college readiness as dictated by ACT, students with scores above this cut-off level who have taken the course have reported great success and found utility within the class. A potential next step is two part: firstly, to mandate the course for all incoming freshmen, and secondly, to structure a freshman experience with the literacy intervention course at its core.

The first change that must be made, aside from mandating the course for all freshmen, is to establish a cohort system. Students could be divided by major. For those students who come in undeclared, there could be cohorts for them as well. These undeclared cohorts could still potentially be grouped by academic proclivities, if known, but a truly undeclared cohort might exist for those who have no current plans for major or minor. This cohort model will have an immediate impact on peer relations and academic success (Maher, 2005). Anyone who teaches freshmen on a college campus and has engaged them in any level of non-academic discussion knows that homesickness and loneliness are big problems with this population. They are frequently coming to college from their senior year of high school, where they were literally the Big Man on Campus and engaged in numerous social activities on a regular basis. This disappears almost immediately upon coming to a college campus, and only those who are already social and extroverted easily make the transition. Belonging to a cohort group could be a significant component of addressing this need.

Each cohort group could also be placed in housing assignments together. Exceptions could be made for commuters. Regardless of where these students actually live, however, they could still be a part of the cohort experience and take part in all requisite activities and classes. The reason for a shared dormitory is to enhance the sense of belongingness that is so vitally important for academic success (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). While this belongingness is not tantamount to the academic experiences of the freshman year, lack thereof is still a major deterrent and this cohort model might help address it.

Mentors, chosen from both the campus and community at large, could be assigned to each cohort. A cohort of students who were all studying pre-veterinary science, for instance, would be paired with a local veterinarian from the area. Another cohort that expressed an interest in becoming elementary school teachers would find their mentor at a local grade school or from faculty in the School of Teacher Education. Ideally, each cohort would have multiple mentors, as these individuals could be a great help in establishing early professional relationships and could help meet the needs of each member of the cohort (Baugh & Scandura, 1999). This does not even address the positive benefits each mentor would receive from the experience.

In addition to the mentoring with professionals in their potential future careers, each freshman could also take part in both volunteer hours and job shadowing. These two areas could potentially overlap. Volunteer hours could be required as service learning can have a tremendous impact on the academic success of undergraduates (Sax & Astin, 1997). The service learning opportunities could also have a positive influence of the civic responsibility for each cohort member.

On a regular, recurring basis, motivational seminars related to their future potential careers, academic success, or even self-help topics could be presented to the cohorts. This seminar series could be one opportunity for students to leave the relative safety of their cohort to potentially meet others. Choice would definitely plan a big role in which seminars each particular student attended.

Dual-term registration would also be mandatory for all freshmen. When each cohort enrolls, they could be placed in courses that will carry them through their fall and spring semesters. For those students who may change major (and subsequently, their cohort) at the end of the fall semester, they would merely transition into the cohort of their new major and take their classes in the spring semester. This will help ensure that students carry an appropriate load of classes, as well as assisting with meeting appropriate courses in their major and general educational requirements.

This freshman year experience should also partner with the Honors College at their university. Rather than just encourage students to graduation, students would be encouraged to greatness. Those with a certain GPA would be referred to the Honors program. For those students who are definitely focused on success, participation in an honors program has been shown to increase likelihood of success (Hartleroad, 2005). This could also be a huge marketing strategy and an increase in Honors College enrollment.

The limitations of such a freshman experience, wrapped around an intervention course with demonstrable efficacy, are bound only by the lack of ingenuity from campus administrators. An experience such as this proposal could completely revolutionize the college experience for those participating. The first year of college is so important, and

as it currently exists, many students slip through the cracks, leaving with nothing except student loan debt for an unfinished degree. This could help to seal that crack, positively impacting retention and graduation rates.

### **Methodological Limitations**

There were some inherent issues that could not be avoided in this study.

Although a truly randomized experimental research design would have been ideal, this is literally impossible in a study such as this one. This is a common shortcoming of educational research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher did not have the opportunity to conduct such experimental research.

In this study, only those students who were still enrolled at the university were eligible to participate in the research. This creates an undeniable issue with selection bias. Aside from the obvious fact that the population could not be randomly sampled, this was a specially identified population. The sample response rate may or may not have been representative of the entire population. Furthermore, the data were restricted only to those who have successfully completed the literacy intervention course. Data from those who failed to complete the intervention were largely ignored, as these individuals are typically not still enrolled at the university. This survivorship bias was not overcome in this study.

The researcher also may have had a bias. This was partially compensated for by using portraiture as the qualitative method for this study. While all efforts were made to present the truth subjectively, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) acknowledge there are probable avenues through which researcher bias can appear in the portraiture paradigm. The most crucial factor is, in the researcher's attempt to create a complete

image from the findings, it is tempting to eliminate data that do not complete the “aesthetic whole” (p. 246). This was overcome in this study by also including data that go against the overall narrative, including issues of student shame and negative feedback.

Also at issue is compensation of participants. Faculty stakeholders were not compensated for their participation. Student stakeholders had the opportunity to earn a \$50 gift card for their participation. Providing minimal compensation for participants is a common practice in research (Grady, 2005). It may be that student stakeholder participation was higher due to the incentive.

The format by which students participated in this research is also limiting. Students were only capable of responding and providing responses via electronic survey. Potential weak technology skills or limited access to technology would have been a hindrance to participation.

One consideration that must be given for faculty stakeholders is the timeline of response. Students who participated commented on a course that occurred at some point between fall 2012 and fall 2015. Faculty stakeholders were responding in spring 2016. The most recent semester may have influenced their responses.

An especially significant point is that this study may lack generalizability. LTCY 101 is one university’s response to a required literacy intervention. The four faculty members who have taught LTCY 101 very well may not represent the typical pool of instructors from other universities. The same can be said for students. While LTCY 101 had an impact at this university, the same cannot necessarily be assumed with different populations of instructors and students.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Numerous avenues of potential future research have availed themselves from the findings of this present study. Some potential research possibilities were discarded as they are not actionable yet could still yield valid data. This same collection of student data could be examined and separated via student demographic data. International student responses isolated could potentially unearth a different set of conclusions.

One weakness of this course is a viable avenue for future research. This present study primarily examined students who successfully completed the literacy intervention course. The responses of those who failed the course may provide a wealth of knowledge that could be useful in decreasing the percentage of failing students.

This research was an examination of the experiences of the faculty and student stakeholders of one literacy intervention course. Due to the nature of the course creation, comparisons were drawn with the typical population and experiences of remedial reading courses. A similar study that focused on the faculty and student stakeholders of a remedial reading course could yield data that could help to refine the quality of remedial coursework.

Given the design flaw of only interviewing faculty stakeholders once, more rich data could be drawn with a longitudinal study of faculty stakeholders. As faculty stated, LTCY 101 has changed over time. Such a study might bring awareness of the reasons for such changes and give insights into the processes, events, and issues that led to the changes.

### **Closing Thoughts**

LTCY 101 was created as a response to state demands for a reduction in

remediation. It has ultimately flourished and continued as hundreds of students have found success as identified by completion with an A, B, or C grade within the course. This success has led to increased retention, improved graduation rates, and continued educational and career opportunities for this population that was once underprepared and under-practiced for the rigors of college-level reading. The ramifications of this population's success will be long-reaching, both for themselves and for the university that helped them achieve this success.

Kaizen is a Japanese philosophy that refers to the state of continuous improvement (Berger, 1997). LTCY 101 and the faculty stakeholders involved with it follow the same philosophy. A course that exists in isolation and fails to improve will ultimately do a grand disservice to its students. Change can be an uncomfortable event to go through. However, for those who have survived change, the end result can be well worth the temporary discomfort. The university, faculty, and students ultimately will benefit from education changes in the status quo of developmental education. Discomfort from change is temporary; the positive results of the change can extend into perpetuity.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **FACULTY STAKEHOLDER CREATOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

#### **QUESTIONS**

1. What was the impetus for the creation of LTCY 199?
2. When was LTCY 199 first conceptualized?
3. How many people were involved in the course creation?
4. What was the general attitude toward LTCY 199 during the creation process?
5. How and why was LTCY 199 conceptualized to be different from the traditional developmental reading model?
6. What was the timeline for the course creation?
7. What obstacles did you face in the creation of LTCY 199?
8. Through what process was LTCY 199 created?
9. What andragogical theories/practices were utilized in LTCY 199 development?
10. How did you envision LTCY 199 prior to its first course offering?
11. Do you have anything else you would like to add about any aspect of LTCY 199?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **FACULTY STAKEHOLDER INSTRUCTOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

#### **QUESTIONS**

1. What evidence of positive learner growth have you witnessed in students?
2. What type of feedback have you received from students on their performance or outcomes in the class?
3. What curricular core competencies of the course do you find most impactful for students?
4. What changes do you feel must occur in students to be successful in this course?
5. What can an instructor do to facilitate these changes in students?
6. What changes have you made in course delivery over the semesters you have taught this course?
7. Do you have anything else you would like to add about any aspect of LTCY 199?

## APPENDIX C

### STUDENT STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

1. What is your ethnicity? (Please check all that apply.)
  - a. Asian/Pacific Islander
  - b. Black/African American
  - c. Caucasian/White
  - d. Hispanic/Latino
  - e. Native American/American Indian
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your sex/gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer not to respond
3. What is the highest level of school your father completed?
  - a. Elementary school
  - b. Middle school
  - c. High school
  - d. 2-year college degree
  - e. 4-year college degree
  - f. Master's or higher
  - g. Do not know
4. What is the highest level of school your mother completed?
  - a. Elementary school
  - b. Middle school
  - c. High school
  - d. 2-year college degree
  - e. 4-year college degree
  - f. Master's or higher
  - g. Do not know
5. What is your current cumulative college GPA?
  - a. 0 – 1.0
  - b. 1.0 – 2.0
  - c. 2.0 – 3.0
  - d. 3.0 – 4.0
  - e. Prefer not to answer
  - f. Do not know



6. Did you successfully complete (earned an A, B, or C) LTCY 199?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Do not recall
7. Please **RATE** the following as to how important each was to your **growth as a student**.

**Circle ONE for each item.**

**1 = Not important**

**2 = Somewhat important**

**3 = Important**

**4 = Very important**

a. Reading Strategies/Guides

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

b. Book Club Readings/Discussions/Activities

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

c. Speaking/Presentations/In-Class Discussions

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

d. Professional Writing/Research Paper

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

e. Motivation/Responsibility

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

f. Work Ethic/Habit Building

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

8. Please rank these items (a to f) in order of benefit (1 = most to 6 = least) to you in terms of success.

\_\_\_\_\_ Reading Strategies/Guides  
\_\_\_\_\_ Book Club Readings/Discussions/Activities  
\_\_\_\_\_ Speaking/Presentations/In-Class Discussions  
\_\_\_\_\_ Professional Writing/Research Paper  
\_\_\_\_\_ Motivation/Responsibility  
\_\_\_\_\_ Work Ethic/Habit Building

9. Open Ended: What are your thoughts, concerns, or insights to share regarding these six elements of LTCY 199 and how they impacted your success as a student?

Please rate the following questions with this scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

10. I was interested in taking LTCY 199.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

11. I was motivated to do well from early in LTCY 199.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

12. I always did my best work in LTCY 199.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

13. LTCY 199 had direct influence in making me a better learner.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

14. LTCY 199 helped me be a better reader.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

15. It was unfair that I was required to take LTCY 199.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

16. I understood why I had to take LTCY 199.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

17. Taking LTCY 199 was unnecessary.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

18. The work ethic I developed in LTCY 199 carried over into other courses I have taken.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

19. I am a more organized learner/reader than I was before I took LTCY 199.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

20. I did not see any direct link between taking LTCY 199 and success in college.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

21. I do not see that LTCY 199 helped me in any way.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

22. I believe I will graduate from college.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

23. I would recommend this course to others.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

#### Optional Open-ended Questions

24. Has any aspect of this course changed you as a learner/student? In what way?

25. If you could change one component of the course, what would it be and why?

26. What do you think were the most positive aspects of LTCY 199 for you as a student?

27. What do you think were the most negative aspects of LTCY 199 for you as a student?

28. What are your overall thoughts about LTCY 199?

## APPENDIX D

### IRB APPROVAL



*INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY*

DATE: March 25, 2016

TO: Jeremy Logsdon  
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [888406-1] A Study of the Academic and Personal Impacts of a Reading Intervention Course: Stories from Stakeholders

REFERENCE #: IRB 16-393

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: March 25, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: June 30, 2016

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a *signed/implied* consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of June 30, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Mooney at (270) 745-2129 or [irb@wku.edu](mailto:irb@wku.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.