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A Qualitative Study of Curriculum in a Developmental Reading at at Community College

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CURRICULUM IN A
DEVELOPMENTAL READING COURSE AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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2013

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CURRICULUM IN A
DEVELOPMENTAL READING COURSE AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

CELINA URANGA GOMEZ, BSN, MED

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This interpretive study examined the curriculum implemented in a developmental reading course at a community college. Approaching curriculum as a three layered construct, (Cohen, 1990; Hartell, 2012; Mendez, 2010; Page, 1991; Page, 1999), I described classroom lessons to understand how the formal curriculum was translated by students and teachers. This study offered a nuanced account of developmental education with a focus on classroom practice to garner a better understanding of how a developmental reading curriculum was enacted in daily classroom life.

This study focused on questions of culture, meaning and context (Erickson, 1986); therefore, I employed a qualitative approach to my study. By studying the experiences and perspectives of those engaged in developmental reading, I also sought to learn about the particular version of a reading curriculum collectively produced and its import to the academic futures of underprepared college readers. Thus, my qualitative case study gives voice to a population of students and teachers rarely heard from in academic research studies.

This study proposed to add to this body of knowledge so that educators may continue to improve instructional practices for underprepared college readers. My analysis showed that classroom lessons in *Advanced College Reading* focused on

teaching reading as a set of discrete skills and on preparing students for the reading exit exam. Such lessons lacked depth, averted reading and were of little value to improving the literacy abilities of underprepared college students.

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CHAPTER ONE: DEVELOPMENTAL READING EDUCATION

1.1 Introduction

Institutions of higher education have accepted underprepared college students since the 1600s (Spann, 2000). The concept of developmental education commenced when students began attending Harvard in 1636 and required tutoring in Greek and Latin. The demand for providing remediation to compensate for underprepared students was even discussed by incoming Harvard President, Charles W. Elliot, back in 1869. He stated, "The American college is obliged to supplement the American school. Whatever elementary instruction the schools fail to give, the college must supply" (Spann, 2000, p. 2). Though providing remediation to poorly prepared students has long historical roots, since its inception, it has continued to plague American colleges and universities (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

The response from post-secondary institutions has been to remediate those students not ready for the traditional higher education curriculum through developmental education (Burley, Butner & Cejda, 2001). Such programs can be found among most two and four year institutions and are generally intended to address students' academic deficiencies. Despite the long existence of remedial programs, particularly those focusing on reading and

literacy, there remains continuing debate regarding the value of developmental education among higher education.

Though developmental education has been present in colleges for many years, there remains much uncertainty about its benefit to students. In fact, studies on what students have to gain from such courses, particularly in the field of developmental reading, remain scarce. Though college reading courses have been traced back to the 1800s, developmental reading education and its curriculum have proved elusive. Moreover, studies on developmental reading curriculum and underprepared college readers have not been at the forefront of reading research. Thus, little is known about its value to students, its import to literacy and students' ability to succeed in college. It is these gaps on the research literature that this study seeks to address and further explore.

1.2 A Brief History of Developmental Education

Attempts to remedy the problem of underprepared students for the rigors and challenges of college courses date back towards the inception of the American system of higher education (Boylan, 1999). In fact, developmental or remedial programs have been present in colleges for nearly 400 years. For instance, many college students accepted to universities such as Harvard and Yale were inadequately prepared and universities accommodated their academic deficiencies with additional

tutoring and other methods of developmental assistance (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). Additionally, in the early 1900s, over 50% of the students enrolled in Ivy League colleges such as Columbia and Yale did not meet admission conditions, and in response, these institutions created developmental programs (Wyatt, 1992). These programs flourished as inadequately prepared students were accepted into higher education and as colleges competed for such students (Maxwell, 1979).

The provisions of the G.I. Bill and the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the later the Higher Education Act 1965 led to a huge growth in higher education and subsequently, developmental education (Payne & Lyman, 1996). Moreover, low income students entered post-secondary universities and community colleges from the 1960s to the 1980s as a result of open admissions procedures and readily accessible government monies, typically in the form of financial aid (Boylan, 1990; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). The arrivals of these new segments of students into postsecondary education led to a growth of developmental education and programs (Boylan, 1990). Terms for such new services and programs increased as well, as Boylan (1990) found "chief among them were such terms as preparatory studies, academic support programs, compensatory education, learning assistance and basic skills" (as cited in Payne & Lyman, 1996, p. 3). However, the variety of labels associated

with developmental education suggested an identity problem, and perhaps even an identity crisis (Tomlinson, 1989). As Bailey (2009) argued, there stands no clear agreement about how to provide developmental education programs most efficiently, which is further complicated by the dearth of research in the field.

1.3 Democratization versus Students' Progress

Despite the huge allocation of funds to such endeavor, debates about the benefits of such investment continue (McCabe, 1998). The literature advocating for remediation argues that it affords educational opportunities to underserved populations, particularly minority and first generation college students (Boylan, 1999). It advances remediation as means to increase persistence and graduation rates among underprepared students (Boylan, 1999; Boylan & Saxon, 1998; McCabe, 2000). From this perspective (Dowd, 2003; Schoenecker, Bollman & Evans, 1998), developmental education is, according to its proponents, an example of the democratization of higher education as it may afford students the possibility of overcoming the barrier of inadequate academic preparation.

Others like Adelman (1998) and Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2002) contend that developmental education stands as a detriment towards students' educational progress. Moreover, parents, students, and lawmakers voicing their frustration with the high rates of remediation and subsequent low graduation

completion rates express concerns that the lack of progress among academically deficient students may indicate that remediation attempts are futile (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002). If the debates on the value of developmental education are volatile, they are also unsettled.

1.4 What is Developmental Education?

The U.S. Department of Education (1996) applies the following description of remedial education: "courses in reading, writing, or mathematics for college students lacking those skills necessary to perform college level work at the level required by the institution" (as cited in Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006, p. 64). The term developmental is also often used in higher education to describe students found to be underprepared or at risk according to standards set by the institution and in the context by which it is taught (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Because classroom lessons and the diversity of settings within which developmental educators teach differ, developmental education program requirements and content often vary.

The majority of colleges and universities offer developmental education to help students improve the necessary academic skills to survive in college credit bearing classes. "However, during the twentieth century, the increased demand for higher education among students from all backgrounds accelerated

the need for remediation in higher education" (Bettinger & Long, 2005, p. 19). Thus, colleges and universities are ever more being asked to instruct students in one or more areas that are inadequately developed for college level work.

Developmental or remedial approaches are often geared towards addressing academic deficits typically in reading, writing and or math (Boylan, 1999). Until the 1990s "the traditional core of developmental education has been remediation" (Brothen & Wombach, 2004, p. 16). The content of remedial courses covers a range of skills according to a review of remedial course descriptions by Boylan, Bonham and Bliss (1992). In remedial mathematics, the material typically ranges from basic arithmetic up towards intermediate algebra. The content of remedial writing ranges from basic grammar, to composition and term paper writing. Remedial reading courses range from vocabulary development to critical thinking. Traditionally, these approaches address academic skill deficiencies and have formed the basis of developmental education since the 1960s. However, a remediation only approach has been contrasted with a broader view of developmental education that encompasses academic support and lifelong learning for all students.

According to the National Association of Developmental Educators (NADE), developmental education includes such

components as services and programs that address academic readiness, diagnostic evaluation and appropriate placement, obstacles to learning and a commitment towards development of learning strategies, both general and specific (NADE, 2013). Developmental education also "refers to programs that focus on the whole learner, with the unique blend of academic and personal strengths and weaknesses that each individual brings to the learning process" (Ignash, 1997, p. 3). Essentially, this view of remedial education is concerned with helping students thrive in college by offering various support systems that address the holistic needs of students.

Arendale (2001) argues that the biggest movement in developmental education is the emphasis on "learning strategies while students are in graduation-credit content courses" (p. 8). Boylan (1999) a proponent on alternatives to remediation, also recommends expanding developmental education methods to include learning communities, freshman seminar courses, supplemental instruction offerings, collaborative learning, critical thinking and paired courses. "Rather than emphasizing students' deficits, many academic professionals have found it more advantageous to teach their students to become active, strategic learners" (Stahl, Simpson, & Francis, 2004, p. 2). However, because of the lack of research in the field, it is unclear whether such approaches are "powerful enough to remediate the academic skills

of underprepared college students with longstanding, serious skill deficits" (Brothen & Womback, 2004, p.18).

1.5 Reading Readiness and Academic Outcomes

An increase of students needing remediation in the field of reading has surged, given the rise in enrollments of students in colleges and universities (Clark, 2004; Cox, Friesner & Khayum, 2003). Due to open admissions policies, many community college students exhibit a wide range of reading skills (Cox et al., 2003; Jenkins & Boswell, 2002). These students enter college without fully understanding what it means to read and comprehend college texts. According to the ACT (2006) the most significant predictor of academic preparation is reading proficiency. Moreover, a U.S. Department of Education study found that inadequate preparation, including limited exposure to college level reading material, affected students' academic outcomes in higher education (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics (2004) also found that the need for remedial reading is a primary indicator that students will be college dropouts. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2006) also reported that only 17% of students participating in remedial reading courses earned a four year degree within an eight year time frame. Finally, Schmidt (2006) found that college students underprepared in the area of reading

are 40% less likely to complete an undergraduate degree than their college ready peers.

Theoretically, the content in developmental reading courses is geared towards expanding students' reading ability to the point where college level textbooks and materials can be understood. However, there has been some difficulty in defining college level reading, and the standards that should drive reading curriculum and instruction (Bosley, 2008; Chisman, 2004). Because reading skills have been found to be of critical importance, a reading curriculum that prepares college students for the rigors of postsecondary education is critical for student success.

1.6 Developmental Reading Approaches

Exactly what is considered remedial or developmental level work remains unclear, and expectations, even within single institutions, often differ (Grubb, 2001). Additionally, some have described the idea of developmental education as "suffering from the lovable and sloppy philosophy and psychology born of the 60s, where intention was more important than result and where the means was an end to itself" (Rice, 1980, p. 9). Because each institution follows its own set of remedial practices, this yields much variability in the implementation and delivery of remediation to underprepared college students. The field of developmental reading is no exception, and

therefore it is unknown if such courses are meeting the needs of underprepared college readers.

Reading instruction has long been a key component of developmental education. In 1849, as the University of Wisconsin founded its first college preparatory division, one of its primary purposes was to offer reading instruction (Boylan, 1988; Briar, 1984). Currently, most colleges offer a developmental education program to underprepared students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2004) reports that 98% of post-secondary institutions offer some form of remediation in reading. Despite the high demand for college reading, Reynolds and Werner (2003) contend that remedial reading practitioners have failed to develop a cohesive agreed upon approach to developing efficient and effective readers within the college setting.

Developmental practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds such as psychology, student development, reading and adult education (Casazza, 1999). Given so, there are substantive differences in college reading programs and instruction. Some remedial programs give credits, while some do not, some are required courses, while others remain optional, and finally, many, but not all require study skills. The reading developmental curriculum may also be affected by how remedial education is organized within the institution (Perin, 2002). For

instance, "if remediation is offered in the English and mathematics departments, rather than in independent developmental education departments, instruction may be closer to the content areas which students are studying" (Perin, 2002, p. 2). They also tend to fall into one of two categories: isolated courses aimed at improving both reading and study skills and strategies, or remedial programs where reading and study skills courses are linked with supplementary instruction in a discipline area such as History or Government (Boylan, 1999).

1.6.1 Reading Curriculum Approaches

Three forms of curriculum delivery are found in studies that address developmental reading education: skills based, content based and strategy based (Nash, 2008). According to Wood (1997), in higher educational environments, traditional reading courses typically teach comprehension strategies and vocabulary. Classes often include three types of reading tasks: training in a reading strategy, a review of textbook reading comprehension and then exercises to enhance reading speed. Using the skills based curriculum approach, college reading teachers emphasize "teaching reading skills through drills on graded paragraphs and exercises on cards" (Maxwell, 1997, p. 12). Many reading courses also have a reading lab requirement where students often are provided with short reading passages for them to practice their

newly learned reading skills via multiple choice or short answer workbooks.

Content based remediation typically pairs a reading course to a credit bearing college course. With this format, students learn reading and study skills techniques using the content and material in their supplemental college course (Maxwell, 1997). There are also integrated reading and English courses that are geared to provide additional instruction in reading and writing activities (Falk-Ross, 2002). The belief in this method is helping students transfer their reading skills to authentic, college level material.

Various developmental reading educators, in the 1990s, switched their attention from focusing on decoding texts and the skills based approach to an emphasis on the student reader (Wood, 1997). Though the skills approach "may lead to growth on tests while promoting a gate keeping function, it must be questioned whether these activities lead students to becoming active readers and learners" (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 2). These approaches have moved towards recognizing that meaning from text is created with the active participation of the student reader and is termed the modern or strategic approach to teaching reading (Wood, 1997). Instructional approaches are purported to develop students' ability to learn to read analytically, thus enhancing overall reading comprehension skills. Instruction

recognizes that all learning and knowledge is rooted in the connection and meaning that the reader constructs. Hence, teaching methods are designed to assist students developing the varied academic skills needed to be successful and persist in college (Simpson et al., 2004).

1.7 Why are Reading Courses so Different?

Despite this change in philosophy regarding remedial reading, there appears to be a hodgepodge of approaches used by college reading instructors. According to a review of college reading textbooks, Wood (1997) found an even split of modern and traditional approaches. Paulsen (1996) also argued that despite these new approaches to helping underprepared college readers, the skills based, direct instruction approach has a strong hold in college remedial reading programs. Consequently, what are left are innumerable approaches in various contexts with the goals solving the challenges of underprepared college readers (Bailey, 2009).

Just as not all students are the same, not all developmental reading programs are the same. According to Lesley (2001), instruction in developmental reading courses is hit or miss with almost no oversight of the programs or faculty members responsible for teaching such remedial courses. Hence, in remedial programs, the most educationally at risk college students are taught by adjunct teachers, "with very little

institutional efficacy or permanency" (Lesley, 2001, p. 181). To complicate matters, the reading problems faced by underprepared college readers are multifaceted and typically encompass outside comprehension problems (Maxwell, 1997). As of yet, there is no one reading level that permits or guarantees college success (Haeuser, 1993; Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006). Also, college reading teachers may be untrained in modern theory and research and are often ununiformed about what other faculty members consider literacy (Maxwell, 1997).

Researchers have cited the need for studies that look into the efficacy of developmental reading courses to understand if they are indeed meeting the needs of poorly prepared college readers (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). Merisotis and Phipps (2000) argue that "research about the effectiveness of remedial education programs has been sporadic, underfunded and inconclusive" (p. 75). Because of a lack of reading research at the college level, no one can detail exactly what college readers instruct on an everyday basis within their reading classes (Wood, 1997). Thus, there is little evidence of their value in improving reading skills or college success. While the demand for college developmental reading courses continues to increase, there is a dearth of research to direct and develop the necessary educational content of such remedial courses so that they are valuable to underprepared college readers (Grubb,

2001; Maxwell, 1997; Paulson, Laine, Biggs, & Bullock, 2003; Wood, 1997).

1.8 Who are Developmental Education Students?

Students in developmental education courses are a diverse group, particularly at the community college. The average age of developmental students is 22, with half of those enrolled in developmental education being eighteen and nineteen year old college freshman (Schmidt, 2006). Students from less affluent families, students of color and students for whom English is not their first language are disproportionately placed in remedial courses (Attewell et al., 2006). Many have been poor students throughout their academic careers, while others did well in high school and have just discovered that college courses are inherently more difficult than high school level courses.

Enrollment of underprepared college students continues to increase due to open admissions and the availability of financial aid programs particularly for low income college students. Subsequently, the majority of developmental education students are considered low income, with Knopp (1996) reporting that 50% of dependent students taking developmental courses come from families which earn \$20,000 or less annually. Additionally, minority students are overrepresented in developmental education. Hispanic and African American college students are more than likely to pursue developmental coursework at some time

in their college career compared to White students (Plucker, Wongsarnpignon & Houser, 2006). Hispanics also demonstrated greater enrollments in remedial reading and writing courses than Black and White students (Ignash, 1997). Additionally, the vast majority of students enrolled in developmental courses have lower than average SAT scores and avoided college preparatory classes while in high school.

1.9 Statement of the Problem

Students participating in developmental reading course are approximately 41% more likely to end up as college dropouts and research indicates that the leading predictor of college attrition is the need for remedial reading (NCES, 2004). Thus, students that demonstrate difficulty with reading face major difficulties in their pursuit of higher education (Adelman, 1998). A reading curriculum that adequately prepares students for the rigors of post-secondary education is needed and to date, little consensus exists as to what constitutes developmental reading and what it should teach. Furthermore, developmental reading classes have been implemented with mixed results. In addition, research on the topic provide few clues about the kinds of skills and knowledge that are taught in developmental reading courses so that students are successful readers, as well as how those skills can best be developed.

Because research on college reading is not as widespread as research on secondary reading education, it is problematic to determine what is happening in college reading courses (Dillard, 1987). Though the provisions of developmental reading courses are geared towards improving students' reading skills, it is largely unknown what occurs in developmental reading courses and with what outcomes. The literature fails to provide a detailed description of developmental reading education and how faculty and students enact it in practice. Such neglect in the literature is critical.

Understanding how students and faculty experience developmental education in the college classroom is central to the design and implementation of developmental reading programs and a curriculum that are likely to prepare students for a college education. Moreover, by describing how developmental reading is enacted, the intended and unintended academic outcomes of such curriculum can be identified. At the very least, through an empirical account of developmental reading education, its curriculum can be understood and appreciated in its complex dimension, allowing educators to identify the challenges and opportunities ahead of them should they embark in the task of transforming it. Such is my task in the next chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Three broad areas shaped my inquiry into college developmental reading education: the body of work describing developmental education, the research exploring the academic outcomes among underprepared college readers, and the curriculum studies on developmental reading. In this chapter, I first present an overview of these works and subsequent debates surrounding the value of developmental education; second, I discuss the academic outcomes among underprepared college readers as advanced by empirical research; finally, I describe the ample research literature on college reading approaches, its import to literacy and its relation to classroom practice. The chapter concludes with a summary and a look at what lies ahead.

2.2 Debates on Developmental Education

The literature on developmental education is contradictory regarding the import of such course of study. For example, when a body of research (Boylan & Saxon, 1999; McCabe & Day, 1998) pronounces developmental education to be beneficial, another corpus of work (Adelman, 1998; Attewall, et al., 2006) declares it detrimental or of no value to students' academic progress. Institutions of higher education invest billions of dollars a year attempting to bring under prepared students up to speed (Boylan & Saxon, 1999). Despite the huge allocation of funds to

such endeavor, debates about the benefits of such investment continue (McCabe & Day, 1998).

A smaller but significant body of research suggests that remediation, specifically in reading, seems to produce attrition in greater numbers (Adelman, 1998; NCES, 2004). For instance, the NCES (2004) reports that the need for remedial reading is associated with lower rates of degree completion than other developmental course taking patterns. Martino et al. (2001) argues that "college students with low literacy skills are underprepared to meet the challenges presented to them in the area of reading comprehension" (p. 2). Yet, developmental reading education and its curriculum are elusive and it is unclear what students have to gain from such remedial coursework. Research on the topic provides few clues about the kinds of skills and knowledge that are taught in developmental reading courses so that students are successful readers. In addition, it is unclear how those skills can best be developed.

In sum, the literature on developmental reading is inconclusive and does not explore what the curriculum means and teaches to those who experience it most directly: students and teachers. In fact, it does not focus on the lessons that are taught in developmental education, nor does it identify the intended or unintended academic outcomes of such curriculum.

Because of these gaps, the question of how or what to teach in college reading classrooms remains unanswered.

2.3 Proponents of Developmental Education

The corpus of work on the benefits of remedial education mostly emphasize that developmental education has positive effects on students' academic outcomes and provides underserved student populations access to higher education. Such literature encompasses both conceptual and empirical arguments: proponents purport that developmental education improves access to higher education for students that would otherwise be denied a college degree (Boylan, 1999; Boylan & Saxon, 1998; McCabe, 2000), and claim that students who enroll in remediation are also retained at higher rates than students who choose not to participate in remedial coursework. Additionally, McCabe (2000), a longtime proponent for academically underprepared college students, contends that remedial education should be a "high priority not only because is it inseparable from the philosophy of access, but also because the nation cannot afford to lose potential workers" (p. 37).

Thousands of students matriculate in post-secondary education poorly prepared for the academic challenges of higher education. To accommodate these underprepared students, most institutions offer some form of developmental education. Annually, with an expenses of approximately 1% of college and

university budgets, over 500,000 college students complete developmental courses (Boylan, 1999). McCabe (2000) emphasizes developmental education's small cost and potential for creating encouraging life skills for underprepared college students.

Conducting a study to determine the impact of remediation on academic outcomes, McCabe (2000) administered a survey in 25 community colleges which varied by region and type of institution. The study generated a sample of 1,520 students who began their remedial studies in 1990. He contends that after participating in developmental education, underprepared college students perform as well in credit bearing classes as students who enroll without needing remedial coursework. Though approximately 15% earns a four year degree, about 33% of students earn a technical two degree or certificate of completion. McCabe (2000) argues that a vital task for colleges and universities is to offer strong remedial programs to improve the prospects for academically underprepared students. In his support of remedial education, he contends that this course of study is inexpensive, is essential to quality, provides access to educational opportunity and successfully remediates students to pursue a college degree.

Researchers in the field of remedial education argue that poorly prepared students that partake in remediation are as academically successful as those students that are found to be

prepared for college studies. For instance, according to McCabe and Day (1998) students that complete developmental education coursework are as likely to be successful in earning a college degree compared to students that begin college academically prepared. The majority of students, according to McCabe and Day (1998) complete their remedial programs within an academic year and over 75% of academically deficient students complete their freshman year with a GPA of 2.0 or higher, although "they continue into the second year at a somewhat lower rate than the general college population" (p. 30). Moreover the Boylan and Bonham (1992) report that close to 90% of students who finish a remedial writing course do well in freshman composition, while 83% who complete a remedial reading course are successful in their first social science course and 77% of remediated math students are successful in college level math (as cited in McCabe & Day, 1998, p. 30). Though these authors report that developmental programs prepare students for credit bearing coursework and enhance student retention, they do not provide detailed evidence that warrants attributing student success to the efficacy of remediation programs.

Schoenecker et al. (1996) also writes about the benefits of remediation. The authors suggest that developmental education improves the academic outcomes of poorly prepared students so much that performance was "indistinguishable from college

prepared students" (p. 18). The study evaluated developmental outcomes at 21 community colleges in Minnesota by tracking 20,543 post high school students' academic progress from 1992 to 1993. A statistical analysis was used to examine differences in persistence rates. The authors reported that students who completed the highest course within the developmental course sequence earned more credits and had higher GPAs than similarly prepared students that did not complete their developmental course sequence. The study also indicated that grade point averages were either significantly higher or not significantly different than college ready students. In regards to persistence, the researchers report that students completing their developmental courses also demonstrated higher persistence rates in reading, writing and math than college ready students and developmental non-takers.

Investigating the effect of remediation on college performance and persistence, Bettinger and Long (2005) tracked 28,000 full-time, 18 to 20 year old freshmen at public colleges using data from the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR). The sample was limited to college students that were enrolled at four year colleges, or who intended to complete a four year degree as indicated on their community college application. Using test scores, college applications, transcripts, and student surveys, the authors tracked students for five years. Their results

suggest that remedial education has a positive effect on the academic outcomes of underprepared students. Students that required remedial coursework both at the four year and two year colleges were more likely to be retained in college when compared to those students with similar placement test scores and backgrounds that weren't mandated to enroll for such coursework. Such students were also more apt to later transfer to a university and to complete a four year degree.

Additionally, underprepared students who did not enroll in remediation demonstrated higher rates of attrition and were less likely to finish their degrees. The authors also found that once controlling for student background, remedial coursework no longer impacted students negatively. Additionally, this outcome was only found at colleges that do not mandate completion of remedial courses prior to enrolling in college level courses.

Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan and Davis (2007) also investigated academic outcomes among underprepared college readers. Questionnaires were administered to 29 public community colleges located in five regions including New England, South Atlantic, Great Lakes, Mountain and South Central. The institutions self-reported data regarding student performance on developmental education. Based on the participant responses, researcher's report that among community college students engaged in remedial reading, 83% completed the class and

remained on the class roster throughout the end of the term, and 76% of these students earned a C grade or better. Additionally, students in remedial reading had the highest pass rates at 69% in college level courses following participation in developmental reading education. Though reading was the least examined in regards to success rates in subsequent college level courses among two year colleges, these findings have important implications as colleges attempt to evaluate which programs are successful in remediating students.

2.4 Opponents of Developmental Education

Notwithstanding the survey research that advances the efficacy or value of remedial education, educational researchers have clashed over the value of remedial education. For instance, McCabe (2000) argues that only 40% to 50% of students who start in junior colleges are successfully remediated. Moreover, high percentages do not earn a bachelor's degree, even though remedial programs are geared for this purpose (McCabe, 2000). Additionally, twice as many remedial students earn occupational associate degrees or certificates. For the seriously deficient students, those that are deficient in reading, writing and math, McCabe argues that only 20% of those students complete remediation.

Attempting an explanation of why remediation might produce student dropouts, Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2002) carried out a

study in junior colleges in a large Midwestern city. Using a mixed methods approach, the researchers collected data including interviews, student surveys, college catalogues and observations of developmental education classrooms. Their analysis, mostly concerned with students' perceptions of developmental education, determined that to avoid damaging students' self-confidence, community colleges preserve students' educational aspirations and avoid conveying stigma to students who test into remedial courses. However, they also found that "the delayed recognition caused by a stigma free approach may be contributing to students dropping out of college altogether and hence accumulating no credentials" (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002, p. 264). Given that community colleges in particular, encourage all students to pursue two year degrees, the authors hypothesize that lengthy delays spent in remediation can lead to student frustration and attrition. The avoidance of remedial labels leads to misperceptions among students and contend that developmental education is essentially a ruse upon academically underprepared students who probably will not graduate with a college degree.

To investigate the academic outcomes among community college students that participated in remedial education, Kolajo (2004) analyzed graduation data from students enrolled at a junior college in Maryland from 1999 to 2000 and 2001 to 2002. Four groups were analyzed: students that completed one remedial

course, students that completed two or more remedial courses, students that placed into remedial courses but did not enroll for such courses and students that did take the placement test. Using an ex post factor analysis of the data, the study revealed that students requiring more than one remedial course required 11 semesters to graduate, while students requiring just one remedial course took 10 semesters to graduate. Those that did not take any remedial courses took eight semesters to graduate. Students that completed one or less remedial courses earned a mean GPA of 3.25, while students completing more than one remedial course earned an overall grade point average of 2.86. Hence, students requiring little or no remediation demonstrated better academic outcomes compared to poorly prepared students.

Investigating the impact of college remediation on students' academic outcomes, Martorell and McFarlin (2011) determined that students do not benefit much from remediation, and that in some cases remediation has negative consequences for them. The study looked at the impact of remediation at two year colleges and four year universities in Texas. Using scores from the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP), and data from the Texas Schools Microdata Panel (TSMP), the investigators reviewed test scores from a cohort of freshman between 1991 to 92 and 1999 to 2000. Students were followed as much as six years after initially enrolling for college, and using descriptive

statistics, namely a regression discontinuity approach, four types of data was generated: number of credits completed, transfer patterns, highest grade completed and college graduation rates. The study found no positive effects or benefits of remediation on academic outcomes, and demonstrated several negative effects of remediation particularly "on the number of academic credits attempted and the likelihood of completing at least one year of college" (p. 452). Community college students in remediation attempted 2.3 less credits than college ready students, required more total courses to complete a degree and were less likely to complete at a minimum one year of college than students deemed college ready. The authors conclude that remediation does not improve graduation rates and that in Texas, remedial programs are ineffective and more research must be done to explore the benefits of remedial education.

Participation in developmental education was also found to impact degree completion among remediated college students. Using survey data among sampled students who earned four year degrees in the 1992-93 academic years, McCormick and Horn (1996) found that enrollment in remedial education delays the time needed to complete a degree. They report that 23% of those students that enrolled in remedial courses took more than six years to graduate with a four year degree, compared with 13% of

those with no remedial coursework. Generally, students enrolled in remedial courses took about one year longer than other students to earn their bachelor's degree. They attribute this delay to several factors such as enrolling part-time, interruptions in enrollment and the fact that remedial courses are typically non-credit bearing.

Graduation rates were found to be negatively impacted among underprepared college students. Attewell et al. (2006) used data garnered from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88) to analyze 6,879 student transcripts. This sample represented a particular nationwide segment of high school graduates who matriculated approximately eight years after high school. The authors report a statistically negative effect on graduation rates among four year university entrants who completed remedial coursework. They conclude that university students who completed three or more developmental courses demonstrated a 12% to 15% lower graduation rate compared to students who completed fewer remedial courses or did not enroll for any remedial courses.

Students have long been arriving on college campuses with varied academic preparation (Wyatt, 1992). Since the 1600s, there have been debates on how to effectively remediate such students, and whether these efforts are deemed worthwhile. Research on both the benefits and drawbacks of remedial

education can be found in the research literature and thus its import to the academic futures of students remains unsettled. Such is the also the case with developmental reading education.

2.5 Academic Outcomes of Underprepared College Readers

College reading instruction has a long history in higher education, and as enrollment in college continues to grow, providing remedial reading will continue to be an important task of institutions of higher learning. In fact, approximately 11% of all new college students participate in developmental reading education (NCES, 2004). Despite its long history, providing remedial reading education to college students has proved difficult. "Research on students who enter college with reading problems has pointed to their lack of success, even after compensatory reading instruction" (Caverly, Nicholson, & Radcliffe, 2004, p. 26).

The NCES (2004) reports that students needing developmental reading appears to be the most severe barrier to earning a degree and is connected to more overall developmental requirements, and with poorer rates of degree completion than other remedial course taking patterns. Thus, while 58% of underprepared students who fail to enroll for remedial education coursework earned a bachelor's degree within approximately eight years, about 17% of students who participate in a remedial reading course earned a four year degree within the same time

frame (NCES, 2004). Additionally, students who participated in a developmental reading course are 41% more likely to be a college drop out. Participating in developmental reading was also associated with greater need for other types of remediation. In fact, 51% of underprepared college students who needed some developmental reading enrolled in four or more developmental courses, compared with 31% of students who enrolled in any developmental math courses.

Adelman (1998) also studied college remediation and uncovered a link between remedial reading course taking and student attrition. He argues that the bigger the need for remediation, the more likely a student is to drop out. Comparing data from the college transcripts of the U.S. high school graduating class of 1982, which followed students through 1993, Adelman (1998) determined that only 24% of students that completed three to four remedial courses earned a four year degree compared to 54% of students that did not enroll in any developmental coursework. Between students who participated in remedial reading coursework, approximately 66% were enrolled at least three or more other remedial courses, and approximately 12% of this cohort went on to earn a four year degree. Additionally, among college students who were mandated to enroll in more than one developmental reading course, less than 9% went

on to earn a four year degree. Thus when reading is the primary problem, completing college is low. As Adelman warns:

No matter what the combination, the conclusion makes unfortunate sense. If you can't read, you can't read the math problem either let alone the chemistry textbook, the historical documents or the business law cases. (p. 2)

Attewell et al. (2006) also observed a significant deleterious impact on graduation completion rates after taking one or more than one developmental reading course after statistically analyzing 6,879 student transcripts from the NELS: 88 databases. This negative effect was present even when controlling for students' academic and social background. Students with reading deficiencies demonstrated a 4% to 7% lower likelihood of completing a college degree. However, among the community college students that enrolled in developmental reading, about 11% were more apt to earn degrees compared to academically similar students that did not enroll for developmental reading. Thus, the authors conclude that at the community college setting, developmental coursework may have an encouraging effect on students' graduation rates.

Using data from the Tennessee Board of Regents and the Higher Education Commission, Boatman and Long (2011), investigated the effect of remediation on academic outcomes

among students. The sample consisted of 200,000 newly enrolled undergraduate students from the Fall 2000 to the Spring 2003 semesters. Using a regression discontinuity design, the authors compared academic achievement using the COMPASS exam among students that tested either just above or just below the cut scores for placement in reading, writing and math. Their results found that underprepared college readers accumulated approximately seven fewer college level hours than their college ready peers. However, the need to enroll for remedial reading only had a slight negative impact on degree completion, particularly among community college students, within a six year timeframe.

Bohr (1994) also found no positive pattern of association among developmental reading courses and reading gain. Drawing from survey data and interviews among freshman students enrolled in two and four year public institutions as well as from a private, liberal arts college, Bohr found that "courses which have been created specifically to increase reading skills, remedial and literacy skills, do not have a significant effect" (p. 9). The author also found small associations between partaking in developmental reading and grades in credit bearing courses. She argues that this finding may be perhaps due to overemphasis on reading methods and that time on task or reading

practice, not instruction, promotes better reading scores among freshman students.

Cox et al. (2003) investigated the impact of enrolling in a remedial reading course versus similarly prepared students who did not engage a remedial reading course. Using data from a large, public university located in the Midwest, the authors analyzed academic outcomes among a cohort of new underprepared college readers from the following semesters: Fall of 1995, Spring of 1996 and Fall of 1996. Using descriptive statistics, a total of 1817 students were tracked through the Fall 2000 semester. They found that underprepared college readers who enrolled and passed a developmental reading course demonstrated higher academic outcomes compared to underprepared college readers who did not enroll in a reading course. Students who earned A grades also significantly outperformed students who did not do as well in their reading courses. They recommended more collaboration among remedial reading course instructors and discipline specific faculty members to develop a curriculum "that offers students an immediate context in which to apply their newly acquired reading skills"(p. 175).

The need to participate in developmental reading education has been attributed to mixed academic outcomes among college students. Underprepared college readers tend to exhibit higher rates of attrition, and consequently, lower graduation rates. As

enrollment in higher education grows and the demand for reading courses increases, it remains imperative that colleges offer a developmental reading curriculum that provides college students with the abilities to succeed in college level coursework.

However, the discipline of college reading has yet to arrive at a consolidated pedagogical approach to teaching underprepared college readers (Nash-Ditzel, 2010; Paulsen, 2006).

2.6 Defining Developmental Reading Curriculum

Developmental reading as a field has yet to arrive at a consistent definition of what constitutes college level reading (Bailey, 2009). What may be considered developmental reading work at one institution could in fact be deemed college level at a similar institution, and therefore remedial programs vary widely (Overby, 2003). Because there lacks a common definition of college level work, institutions of higher education commonly develop their own criteria for successful completion of developmental reading courses. The International Reading Association (2012), which is currently the most recognized literacy organization in the world, has done little to help this problem. "National standards for literacy professionals only exacerbate the problem, for the association doesn't even acknowledge postsecondary reading and learning instruction as a unique field in need of standards drawn from its own body of theory, research and best practice" (Stahl & Boylan, 2003, p.

110). Hence, the absence of guidance on college reading has culminated in diverse and differentiated teaching practices among underprepared college readers.

2.7 Developmental Reading Approaches

Reading has been considered the foundation for many college skills (Fonte, 1997; Schoenecker et al., 1996) and reading programs typically offer a variety of services to enhance these skills, including supplemental instruction, tutoring, labs and academic counseling services. Because poor reading skills have been found to have a profound impact on student success, it is imperative that developmental reading courses provide students with the academic skills necessary to meet the expected reading requirements in college.

Though college students requiring remedial education has continued to increase, the research studies on preparing such students has not followed pace (Grubb, 2001). Among K-12 grades, various issues of literacy have been widely studied, yet literacy studies among postsecondary college population are relatively scarce (Nash, 2008). Though researchers argue that junior colleges are the most appropriate atmosphere for developmental programs (Adelman, 1996; Chrisman, 2004; Nash, 2008), studies concentrating mainly on remedial reading approaches at the two year college are difficult to find. Thus, it is difficult to describe with confidence what community

college faculty teach on a day-to-day basis in their reading courses (Wood, 1997).

The issue of inadequate reading skills has become more profound as time has passed. Poor reading was initially viewed as one of having poor study habits and there was general agreement that reading, vocabulary instruction and study skills were essential to college success (O'Hear, 1993). However, due to the lack of research, little was known about teaching these skills to college students, as there were few trained professionals in the field. Instructional methods have varied widely in regards to developmental college reading. For instance, such curriculum approaches have included workbooks, machines that control rate and eye span, independent study courses, mastery learning, computer aided programs, video and audio tapes, counseling sessions, and reading/study strategies, which have all had their advocates (O'Hear, 1993). However, despite these different approaches to college reading, there have been little gains in student success in higher education (Adelmam, 1998; Bohr, 1994; Maxwell, 1997; Wood, 1997).

Although study skills and reading developmental courses were offered at many post-secondary institutions for many years, the majority of formal post-secondary remedial reading programs developed during the 1970s and 1980s (Bullock, Madden, & Mallery, 1990). However, designing effective reading and study

skills courses has proved difficult. In fact, best practices in the field of remedial reading are not agreed upon even among reading experts (Falk-Ross, 2002; Simpson & Nist, 2000). Of that found in the literature on college reading developmental approaches, there are generally three models of reading remediation: skills based, content based and strategy based (Nash, 2008).

2.7.1 The Basic Skills Approach

According to Bohr (1993), courses that have been developed to specifically address remedial reading skills do not significantly improve literacy abilities. However, according to Wood (2007), the most common type of reading program at the postsecondary level is the skills based, teacher directed remediation model, also known as the traditional model of instruction. This remediation approach provides reading and study skills classes, aimed at instructing students on various reading strategies, such as SQ3R and reading speed (Simpson & Nist, 2000). Often, reading programs use decontextualized reading passages in commercial workbooks and standardized tests in order to practice specific skills. It is often assumed that underprepared college readers will be able to modify and transfer their newly developed reading skills to their credit classes and reading tasks, and will be also able to read and

comprehend college level material (Nash, 2008; Pearson, Roelher, Dole & Duffy, 1992; Simpson & Nist, 2000).

According to Maxwell (1997), skills based college developmental reading approaches are based on a deficit model of teaching and learning. Classes normally begin with a test to isolate reading problems, and material is arranged to address such weaknesses identified on the test. The area of students' reading deficiencies is typically used as an instructional starting place for college instructors. Additionally, remedial programs outline their delivery of remediation and course objectives based on state imposed reading exams (Bower, Caverly, Stahl, & Voge, 2003; Simpson, Hynd, Nist, & Burrell, 1997). Remedial programs tend to emphasize the reading strategies found on these exams. However "it is acknowledged that such practice may lead to growth on tests while promoting a gate keeping function, but it must be questioned whether these activities lead students to becoming active readers and learners" (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 2). Students are often not required to engage in reading of their own course textbooks or read any other resources from their other content classes. Additionally, most of the classroom teaching is delivered via lecture format (Wood, 1997).

The skills based approach also bases its practice on the medical model of instruction. Using the medical model, reading

instruction begins with units of texts as small isolated words, and then progresses to phrases and paragraphs, and then moves forward towards entire reading selections (Hayes & Diehl, 1982). Students are given much practice on answering questions and memorizing bits of information, with the hope of eventually getting the meaning of texts. The stress is on the rote technique of learning, and not necessarily the processes of reading. Within this model, reading machines were also employed to assist in the instruction of reading and included, tachistoscopes, recording, skimmers and scanners, accelerators, and general teaching machines (Ahrendt, 1975).

Ahrendt (1975) describes teaching college reading as comprised of basic skill deficiencies such as word attack and comprehension skills, with instruction being simple, direct and specific. "Various skills such as vocabulary building, improvement of rate and comprehension, and skimming and scanning are discussed by the instructor and then the student is given an opportunity to practice these skills using commercially prepared documents" (p. 17). He also notes the importance of instructing students how to transfer their newly learned reading skills to a content area so that students can achieve academic success in their college coursework.

Research has revealed the impact of skills-based reading programs (Hennessey, 1990; Katz & Wright, 1977). Katz and Wright

(1977) employed a study to evaluate a course taught by reading instructors that emphasized basic skills such as vocabulary, note taking, study skills, and summarizing. They were specifically interested if there were academic or behavioral differences among similar groups of students that completed the course, or did not complete the course. Subjects were 38 pairs of university freshman students. Data was collected over four semesters on the ratio of courses passed to those attempted, grades earned, and course withdrawals. Data was analyzed using analysis of variance design. Results indicate that students completing the study skills course demonstrated lower rates of attrition after the first semester of studies. However, by the fourth semester of enrollment, both groups of students had dropped between 9% and 10% of all courses taken. The authors conclude that students need continuing support to maintain gains over their college years.

Developmental reading programs with a substantial component of skills based teaching were found to increase grade point average in a study comparing developmental reading student outcomes to those that did not enroll in the courses (Hennessey, 1990). Hennessey (1990) conducted a six year longitudinal study to examine the differences in academic status, quality point averages and persistence of students who successfully completed a reading improvement course. The sample consisted of 284

students and data was collected from their permanent student records. The reading course was a self-paced course that focused on study skills, reading rate, vocabulary improvement, recognizing main ideas and interpreting graphic aids. Analysis of variance and c-square were used to analyze findings. Hennessey found that community college students that did participate in a remedial reading course were found to have higher persistence rates and grade point averages than students that did not complete such courses. Additionally, she reports that students taking a voluntary developmental reading course tended to have a lower dropout rates than students who refused to take the course or were exempt from taking it due to their high test scores.

In essence, this study confirmed that a skill based reading method assisted students in advancing reading skills and promoted a positive approach towards reading. Though these outcomes document learning within the remedial class, they did not determine that this reading approach led to enhanced persistence or graduation rates. Moreover, Katz and Wright (1977) determined that the long term impact study skills classes are negligible and insignificant. Hayes and Diehl (1982) also argue that skills "programs are more concerned with test scores and isolated skills than with developing effective reading of the kinds of materials students actually encounter in college"

(p. 657). They contend that it is easier to show student improvement on criterion referenced tests and isolated reading or study skills than to make an impact on textbook reading strategies. Therefore, it is unclear how this skills based approach is of value to students' academic futures.

Robbins (1981) argues that college students who are deficient in basic comprehension reading skills are also "handicapped by a lack of proficient reading skills, yet many college reading programs do not go beyond literal comprehension, vocabulary and study skills" (p. 300). Skills oriented instruction has received criticism in the reading research community (Henry, 1995). For instance, Richardson, Fisk and Okun (1983) argue that instruction in developmental reading education and in subsequent college courses has resulted in the compartmentalization of literacy skills. Literacy is not strongly encouraged and faculty expect minimal reading and writing from students. Thus students have little opportunity to develop or practice critical thinking skills. These researchers conclude that high quality reading instruction requires the introduction of challenging reading materials in developmental courses and opportunities for students to critically reflect on what is being read.

Henry (1995) also reports that the skills oriented approach also leaves students unable to "make heads or tails of the

passages they read" (p. 2). Essentially, reading words and making meaning are not one and the same. Thus this approach to teaching college reading is of little benefit to students' long term success in college, because it fails to expand the level of reading comprehension needed to understand college texts and materials.

Hayes and Diehl (1982) also report that the reason basic skills programs rarely achieve long term transfer of skills is due to the poor quality of materials used in teaching reading. They argue that college reading programs must contain authentic texts, meaning texts and reading material that students will encounter later in their college studies. "Since students will be reading entire chapters from a variety of disciplines, instruction and practice using such materials makes more sense, in terms of ensuring transfer, than does using isolated paragraphs, anecdotal selections, or worksheets" (p. 659). This technique would help making college reading more meaningful and help students apply new thinking strategies to their reading tasks.

Robbins (1981) also calls for more instruction in critical reading skills. She argues of the time successful college students spend reading over 50% is spent in critical reading. She employed a quantitative survey of the reading behavior among 22 community college students that were registered in a reading

improvement course. Students were required to read three 1000 word passages from three sources and were then given a comprehension test on each of the three excerpts. Scores on the comprehension test indicated that students indicated serious difficulty in comprehending ideas by the authors. Alarming, the passages were derived from a college level introductory sociology textbook, with reading levels ranging as low as ninth grade. She concludes that reading improvement courses need more emphasis critical thinking skills and reading behaviors of students. Without this emphasis, developmental reading courses will not provide the skills necessary to help students read or analyze and understand college texts.

Levin and Calcagno (2008) contend that the skills based approach has not proven to be successful with underprepared students in developmental courses. They argue that there are no dependable national surveys of teaching approaches employed among developmental courses at two year colleges, and "casual observation at many sites suggests that drill and skill approaches are still dominant" (Levin & Calcagno, 2008, p. 185). This approach often requires tedious repetition of a skill to understand what is being communicated and taught. The abstract and isolated nature of this style of pedagogy prevents students from applying the skills learned in such courses to later academic and vocational courses of study. They believe a

feasible solution is to connect basic skills improvement to actual real applications in either vocational or academic coursework. This model, often referred to as content based remediation, is another developmental teaching approach found in the current literature.

2.7.2 Content Based Remediation

Another remediation model joins remedial reading courses with discipline related classes. In this method, the resources from the discipline related class are used as a guide to providing instruction in the remedial course (Falk-Ross, 2002; Martino, Norris & Hoffman, 2001; Olsen, 1995). Often, these types of classes tend to also emphasize study skills or reading strategies. In this type of instruction, students learn specific reading strategies such as developing vocabulary, effective note-taking, preparing for exams, increasing reading efficiency, and various learning strategies among a specific content area or domain (Falk-Ross, 2002; Simpson & Nist, 2000). This approach calls for the combination of general reading courses along with context specific instruction.

Paulsen and Armstrong (2010) also recommend "caution against any perspective that position literacy as a set of decontextualized skills" (p. 3). Instead, academic literacy must encompass reading in diverse academic contexts and involves more than just rote memorization of isolated skills. Imperative for

reading instructors is to recognize "the discipline specific literacy expectations that students must navigate at the college level" (p. 10), and to include explicit navigation of these literacies.

Along the same line of content based remediation, there has been a movement towards combining reading and writing processes to enhance meaning and understanding of material (Falk-Ross, 2002). Linked courses teach basic skills in topics such as reading or writing to students who are also enrolled in a credit bearing college level course. There are various models for this particular method which include learning communities, supplemental instruction, paired courses and adjunct courses.

Carrying out a survey of approximately 235 reading programs in 1987 among two year and four year colleges, (Laine, Laine & Bullock, 1999) found that 161 programs stated using paired instruction, typically including reading and writing components. This method provides students with hands on reading and study skills needed for such classes as sociology or biology. Dimon (1991) asserts that reading and study skills information has immediate utility to the student and is not a series of skills or strategies that theoretically may be transferred from the reading book to a content class sometime in the future. Furthermore, she argues that such courses work because they have definable purpose, contain support groups, challenge students

and promote participation. However, similar to the skills based model, this method has yielded mixed results in regards to improving students' reading skills.

Martino et al. (2001) equated an integrated reading method, called Communicative Reading Strategies (CRS) with a skill based approach among underprepared college readers. Subjects for the study were eight second semester college freshman enrolled in a freshman level biology course. Students completed the Nelson Denny Reading Test to establish their reading comprehension levels and received eight weeks of instruction, in either CRS or the skills approach. CRS strategies included parsing, preparatory set, cloze, acknowledgement, extension, association, generalization, semantic cue, fluent reading, paraphrase and summarization. The skills instruction included building a strong vocabulary, prefixes, suffixes, and roots, reading for the main idea, reading for information, signal words and previewing, comparison and contrast and making inferences. Using post-instruction scores, the researchers reported increased reading comprehension of the biology text using the CRS method. Additionally, they report that instruction "utilized real situations in that students had multiple opportunities to practice skills with their biology texts" (p. 8).

Falk-Ross (2002) employed a mixed methods study of four students participating in a college remedial reading course. She

employed literacy techniques that combined reading and writing assignments to enhance reading comprehension and literacy skills among students. In her study, she examined students' progress in three areas: connections in reading and writing, language and vocabulary development, and significance of reading. Arguing that developmental reading courses that are skills based are ineffective, Falk-Ross employed three reading comprehension approaches: free writing on topics important to the student, independent and shared reading, and direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies. Comparing pre and post reading test scores using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the author found that each of the four college students improved the equivalent of approximately three grade levels in reading attainment. She concludes that reading and writing pairings are useful literacy strategies.

Commander and Smith (1995) conducted a study of academic outcomes among students enrolled in a newly developed adjunct course. Prior to the development of this course, students in developmental studies with a reading requirement had to successfully complete a reading course before registering for any content area course at the university. The course paired history with a learning strategy class and enrolled students that were identified at this particular university as at-risk students that were conditionally admitted and were mandated to

enroll in a remedial reading class. The adjunct course permitted students to co-register for reading and history. The curriculum for the course included learning strategies, metacognitive awareness and key ideas that give structure to the study of history. Outcomes of the adjunct classes were based on the grades earned among enrolled students. Seventy five percent of the adjunct students passed the class with a grade of C or better, but when compared to the general student population, the "adjunct students' average grade on a 4.0 scale was 1.5 in history, while the overall average for history was 2.3" (p. 356). The authors argue that prior course experiences influence academic achievement. They conclude that developmental students benefit from taking other college courses before taking a history course because history requires extensive amounts of reading tasks.

2.7.3 Strategy Based Instruction

The third predominate developmental reading instruction model found in the research is strategy based instruction, also referred to as critical reading instruction or the modern approach to teaching reading (Wood, 1997). "Rather than emphasizing students' deficits, many academic assistance professionals have found it more advantageous to teach their students to become active, strategic learners" (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 2). In this approach, students are taught to reflect

critically about their reading material and their development as college readers. Hence, critical reading focuses on eliciting meaning from text (Marschall & Davis, 2012). Central to this belief is the understanding that reading is a process of constructing meaning rather than decoding (Henry, 1995). Instruction tends to be more student-focused and the instructor varies learning experiences based on each student's needs (Simpson & Nist, 2000). Group activities are encouraged. Moreover, it stresses reading as thinking and emphasizes the significance of prior knowledge. Reading is seen as an interactive, social activity, where probing and questioning is imperative to comprehension. Course textbooks assess comprehension with open ended problems and questions, and require written responses and class discussions, as opposed to multiple choice assessments.

Strategy based instruction also emphasizes the importance of providing sustained opportunities for practicing strategies with authentic texts and tasks (Stahl, 2006). Experts in the field of reading have called for teaching underprepared students a vast repertoire of reading skills and strategies among authentic texts that would support purposeful and flexible application of strategies (Simpson, et al., 2004; Stahl, 2006). College students must be taught the procedural and conditional knowledge of a strategy embedded in a realistic context, as

strategies taught in isolation have little transfer value (Simpson & Nist, 2000). College readers should also be taught to create meaning in their understanding of material, to include vigilant use of applicable strategies and examination of their comprehension.

Weiner (2002) also criticized how institutions of higher education assume that literacy can be taught via "methodological proscriptions and high stakes testing on decontextualized generic texts" (p. 151). Instead, college students must be exposed to a variety of texts, and remediation must be conceptualized as more than literal comprehension and phonetic decoding. Literacy encompasses reading critically, which is more than teaching reading as memorizing facts or skills to pass an exam. Strategic reading incorporates the process of "translation, explication, interpretation and construction" (p. 157), to include critical questioning and critical dialogue, thus facilitating students' ability to critically think and analyze as they read.

The call for explicit instruction in reading skills and strategies and studies examining reading development among underprepared college students heralded from the field of literacy development in young children (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Pressley, 2000). Experts studying explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies increased during

the 1970s when Durkin's (1978-79) seminal study on reading comprehension teaching among elementary school settings was published. She found that almost no reading comprehension instruction took place in her observations in elementary school settings. Instead, much time was spent on non-instructional activities such as grading papers and scolding students.

Durkin (1978-79) conducted observational studies to discover how comprehension instruction was actually produced in social studies and reading classrooms in an elementary school setting, particularly grades three through six. Researchers found that less than 1% of teacher time was devoted to comprehension instruction and instead, teachers spent most of their time just mentioning comprehension skills, and helping with assigned work so that children marked the correct answers. Additionally, comprehension instruction, particularly in the reading class, was deemed "shallow" (p. 508).

Among the social studies classrooms, assigned teachers did not attempt to help children with reading comprehension, even though many of the children could not read the assigned material or content. In fact, "no teacher saw the social studies period as a time to help with reading" (p. 502), despite that many students could not read or comprehend the material. Largely, Durkin found that reading comprehension instruction was nearly absent and there was also little instruction in other skills

related to reading literacy. Researchers characterized the teachers as "interrogators" and "assignment givers" who misused time on non-instructional activities (p. 520) and who used large amounts of time on "giving, completing and checking assignments" (p. 520). Consequently, children spent much of their day in the class using workbooks and on projects that the researchers referred to as "busy work" (p. 524).

Durkin (1978-1979) found that "practically no comprehension was seen" (p. 520) among elementary classrooms. Hence, Durkin's account of the lack of reading instruction in elementary classrooms spurred researchers in the college reading field to develop methods and processes where reading comprehension instruction could be communicated more explicitly (Duffy, 2002). This led to studies in areas such as explicit instruction of strategies to aide in reading comprehension strategies and how those skills could best be developed (Duffy, 2002).

Explicit instruction centers on three main tenants: describing and outlining the reading strategy: explicating why the strategy is beneficial; and providing explicit instruction in the application of the strategy (Hong-Lam & Leavell, 2011; Nist & Holschuh, 2000; Pressly & Harris, 2006). Instructors within college reading disciplines typically refer to these reading strategies as explicit or direct reading strategy instruction (Nist & Holschuh, 2000). Most early studies of

explicit instruction of reading strategies have addressed children's literacy achievement, but very few have looked at strategy instruction among college students. Of those found in the research literature, there have been mixed results. Both positive and negligible results have been reported on reading comprehension abilities.

Wang (2006) called for more explicit instruction in reading strategies and examined students' levels of comprehension using the Nelson-Denney Reading Test. This version of the Nelson-Denney Reading Test was published in 1993 and tests students in vocabulary and reading comprehension. The sample consisted of 55 students who were enrolled in a remedial reading class at a junior college located in the Midwest. Examining the types of questions students answered correctly on the Nelson-Denney, the author determined that students demonstrated weaknesses in critical thinking, inference and reading strategy, leading to poor comprehension abilities. The lack of language skills among developmental students also played a part in their poor test results. The author called for explicit instruction in strategies geared towards enhancing student's knowledge base, making meaning of the text and addressing students' analytical skills.

According to Hartman (1994) college students who have established strategy skills are more likely to comprehend,

remember and transfer knowledge to different situations than college students who have only been taught isolated strategies devoid of a larger context of strategic learning. Essentially, they argue that college developmental reading teachers should place more emphasis on the college reader, instead of the course textbook or lessons, and must recognize that understanding is embedded in the meaning the student constructs (Laine et al., 1999). Basically, by offering a diversity of dynamic learning and reading strategies which are communicated in a straightforward manner, it is presumed that students will garner awareness of their learning styles and ascertain the best ways to comprehend reading materials. Teachers need to offer underprepared students with an understanding on appropriately applying particular reading skills to instill independent learning. Problematic is that "very few researchers have actually collected and analyzed students' strategies to determine whether they have been correctly interpreted and applied and few researchers if any have provided them with feedback on their strategy attempts (Simpson & Nist, 2000, p. 532).

Caverly et al., (2004) studied the efficacy of strategic instruction in the area of reading comprehension amongst developmental students. In their research of college readers, they conducted two studies. For the first study, Predict,

Locate, Add and Note (PLAN), a strategic reading heuristic was utilized; the second study involved a treatment group and a control group. Study one consisted of 36 developmental reading students and the second study consisted of 129 students. Results of study one were based on paired samples t-tests. Gains were found in areas of cognition, metacognitive, and affective measures; no gains were found in reading efficacy. In study two, test statistics utilized were paired samples t-tests and the Mann-Whitney U. Results showed significant improvement on subsequent standardized reading test assessment for the treatment group. More importantly, the researchers found that after the instructional interventions, students effectively applied the reading strategies in the proper context.

Hong-Nam and Leavell (2011) investigated the use of reading strategies among a cohort of 32 students enrolled in two remedial reading classes at a four year college situated in the Midwest. The goal of the reading class was to develop students' literacy skills, with an emphasis on reading comprehension strategies. Explicit strategy instruction in five core areas (determining word meaning, understanding main ideas, identifying writer's purpose, analyzing organization of reading selection and using strategies for critical analysis) was incorporated to develop students' awareness and knowledge of proper strategy use. Explicit modeling events were followed by guided and

independent practice during lab and class time. To measure strategy acquisition, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (2007) was applied to analyze data collected from three reading and self-concept questionnaires. Results indicated that direct instruction in reading comprehension strategies increased developmental readers' reported strategy, particularly when reading academic and school related materials. Additionally, students reported improved awareness of recognizing and effectively applying appropriate strategies when reading.

Frazier (1993) also investigated strategy instruction among students in college. She researched both the use and amount of annotations in a biology course among four college students. College students, in their reading courses, were provided with explicit instruction of annotation methods and then met individually every two to three weeks with the researchers. They were also provided with oral and written feedback on the quality of their annotations. Frazier determined that students only annotated when they were mandated to and that students displayed a high level of resistance when it came to annotating. Frazier asserted that students believed that annotating was useful but they found it "tedious and time consuming" (Frazier, 1993, p. 31). Students reported that their lack of prior knowledge, inability to distinguish important material from trivial information and the difficult vocabulary in the text all

contributed to their lack of comprehension and failure to consistently annotate. Additionally, Frazier believed that it may be unlikely to assume that students can comprehend annotation skills in a 16 week semester and that developing the ability and knowledge of how to properly apply reading strategies, such as annotating, takes a longer time frame to develop.

Hindering reading strategy research is also the lack of agreement on what is considered a reading strategy. Alexander and Jetton (2002) argue that in their review of learning from text, there has been little effort to unpack the meaning of the term "strategy" (p. 295). Accordingly, they report that "the same procedures (e.g. finding the main ideas, locating supporting details, or making inferences) can fit under both the skill and strategy (as cited in Bullock et al., 2003-2004, p. 27). Simpson & Nist (2000) argue that instruction in a specific strategy is more than just exposure. Similarly, Routman (1994) argues that what elevates a basic skill to a strategy is dependent on whether the student knows when and how to apply the particular strategy (as cited in Bullock et al., 2003-2004, p. 27).

Strategic reading has been defined in different ways by several researchers. Caverly et al., (2004) determined that readers using strategic methods often used a certain amount of

cognitive or metacognitive practices such as forecasting, imaging, analysis, understanding, observing, and/or summarizing. Alexander and Jetton (2000) agreed that strategic reading encompasses routine, focused, effortful, deliberate, vital, and facilitative processes. Nist and Simpson (as cited in Caverly et. al., 2004) found that for developmental readers, explicit cognitive and metacognitive methods were corroborated by studies (e.g., questioning, summarizing of writing, and organizing tactics such as mapping). Devine and Kania (2003) also distinguish skills from strategies in that skills describe academic competencies, such as taking notes during class time, while strategies promote learning and comprehension, including retention. Additionally, the selection and use of strategies are highly dependent on what the student knows, on their desire and interest to use them, and on the belief that the efforts to use the strategies will be of benefit (Mulcahy-Ernt & Caverly, 2009).

Studies on reading methods provide some insight into different approaches in educating college readers. The research also highlights the vast repertoire of pedagogical approaches to teaching developmental reading. However, it remains unclear if such research is adequately informing classroom practice. Moreover, it is uncertain what students are learning in college

reading classrooms which may signal to this causal link of poor reading and lower academic outcomes.

2.8 Classroom Practice

Whether or not college teachers are using the principles of strategic reading in their classrooms is unclear. In a survey of best practices in college reading instruction by Bullock, Laine and Laine (2003-2004), the authors compared responses with current thinking on learning strategies as revealed in the literature. The intent of the survey was to determine what best practices were being used by college reading teachers. The responses revealed that several research validated strategies failed to be mentioned by the respondents to include: transfer of reading strategies to college texts, use of metacognitive skills, generating questions, helping students develop organizing strategies and recognition of the substantial amount of time required for strategy instruction. Moreover, "less than half of those who described having a best practice formally evaluated it" (p. 31). They conclude their findings by stating "how can practitioners in college literacy and learning be moved to employ research based strategic teaching?" (p. 34).

According to Wood (1997) teaching in remedial reading course is mainly driven by the assigned textbook. Wood (1997) sampled 20 developmental reading texts used in colleges which were published from 1993 to 1997 and determined that eight of

the books were classified as traditional, eight as modern and four as a mixture of both methods. Traditional books are defined as teaching discrete study and reading skills using a workbook format. Modern books are defined as containing multicultural readings that contain college level excerpts and critical reading strategies and components. She argues that the traditional approach to teaching reading tends to be less difficult and more predictable for instructors to implement. However, recent research indicates that a strategic approach to teaching reading better prepares student to read college texts (Simpson & Nist, 2000).

2.9 Summary

Developmental reading education is not new. However, the field has yet to develop a consolidated pedagogical foundation to influence instructional practice on a larger scale and has also failed to reach a universally agreed upon approach to creating effective and proficient readers at the college level (Nash-Ditzel, 2010; Paulsen, 2006). Part of the problem is there lacks national measures to define placement in reading courses, as well as criteria for what is considered college level and what is considered remedial reading work. With limited research studies geared directly to college preparatory courses to base pedagogical instruction on, developmental college reading instructors are required to figure out on their own what

actually works for their underprepared readers. Consequently, a variety of instructional methods are found in the research literature, each with its proponents and opponents.

Despite the available research on college reading, little discussion exists on the impact of developmental reading education on retention and academic futures of underprepared college readers. Most studies focus on the short term acquisition of reading skills, and not on whether these skills improve reading comprehension as student progress through their college studies. Thus, the long term values of such courses are unstudied and thus unknown. Incomplete data regarding the benefits of taking a developmental reading course warrant further research.

Because studies at the community college level are scarce and lack a comprehensive description of instructional delivery, it is also difficult to understand what teaching and learning is occurring in college reading classrooms. A few research studies attempted to describe certain approaches implemented in remedial reading classes, but do not clarify them enough to be replicated among other classroom settings (Frazier, 1993; Hennessey, 1990). Very little attention is given to the complex issue of the reading curriculum, how it should be taught, or how remediation should be structured for underprepared college readers who struggle to demonstrate college reading skills. Because of this

lack of discussion, it is unknown if findings from research practices have any implications or impact in the college classroom. Thus, it is unclear whether the developmental reading curriculum is meeting its goal of preparing students for college reading demands.

Often omitted from most college reading based studies are the individual voices of remedial reading students (Nash, 2008). In regards to college reading teachers, it is unclear whether instructors of developmental reading courses are aware of the immense gaps in the research literature and whether they are able to catch these struggling readers up to their college-ready peers in one or two semesters. Therefore, this study provides an in depth description of a reading curriculum in a community college setting, and illuminates the perspectives students and teachers, a population infrequently heard from in literacy studies.

This study will provide readers with a more nuanced approach to the complexity involved in the teaching and learning of developmental reading education. I ask what happens in developmental reading classes that may signal to higher attrition rates among students engaged in such studies. This study proposes to add to this body of knowledge so that educators may continue to improve instructional practices for underprepared college readers.

2.9.1 What Lies Ahead?

Developmental college readers have not been the forefront of studies of curriculum. I look into a reading classroom at a community college setting to explore the curriculum in place and in practice for underprepared college students. I set out to understand what developmental reading education is and explore the nature of the knowledge it teaches. By documenting how these classroom participants enact developmental reading, I attempt to get a more grounded understanding what such program of study is in practice. This study will provide insight into a curriculum aimed at teaching underprepared college readers and its import to literacy and students' academic futures.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study focuses on questions of culture, meaning and context (Erickson, 1986); therefore, I employed a qualitative approach to my study. I specifically sought to understand what it means to be a student and teacher within the context of developmental reading education. By studying the experiences and perspectives of those engaged in developmental reading, I also seek to learn about the particular version of a reading curriculum they collectively produced and its import to the academic futures of underprepared college readers. These questions, as basic as they might be, remain unexplored by the literature on reading remediation.

3.2 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Employing an interpretive approach, I describe the meaning of social life from the everyday perspective of informants. By studying the processes by which social actors construct their worlds, or culture, I provided a detailed description from the actor's point of view, (Erickson, 1986; Geertz, 1973). Hence, my focus is how classroom participants translate the curriculum and negotiate their meaning in an ongoing process (Page, 1991; Page, 1999).

Given my interpretive approach, I examine what it means to be a teacher and what it means to be a student in developmental

reading education. I assume that the community college and the classroom participants interpret the curriculum as defined by the state guidelines. Thus, I examine the social constructions of these interpretations (Geertz, 1973). Additionally, I propose that the teaching and learning of developmental reading education vary in context, and may be interpreted differently among institutions and classrooms (Erickson, 1986).

Documentation of these variations is critical to the academic outcomes of developmental education, though they are often ignored in most research and accounts of such course of study.

Of central concern to my study and addressed via interpretive research, is examining the nature of teaching and learning as reflexive meanings-perspectives produced by classroom actors. This approach posits classrooms as social environments that are shaped and in turn are being shaped by its participants (Erickson, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Page, 1991; Page, 1999). Thus, the focus of this study centers on the social interactions that take place in the classroom.

Like other classroom research within the interpretivist tradition, (Cohen, 1990; Erickson, 1986; Hartell, 2012; Mendez, 2010; Page, 1991; Page, 1999) my aim was to portray what developmental education is in practice. An interpretive study also allows me to focus on the enacted and experienced curriculum. I seek to learn how instructors and students produce

and give meaning to their everyday classroom interaction, how they construct a local version of developmental education, and with what particular outcomes to students' academic preparation. Hence, interpretive research focuses on the curriculum, its meaning among actors, and how it is constructed, enacted and negotiated in classrooms.

Ethnography, a particular methodology within qualitative approaches provides a description of culture and allows for detailed accounts of life experiences within a natural setting. Ethnography is also thick description (Geertz, 1973). That is the descriptions and accounts of particular occurrences. It seeks to understand and describe the natural social world as it actually exists.

Culture is conceived as a context that within ethnography is thickly described and is expressed through social action or behavior (Geertz, 1973). Thus, to get at an understanding of the worlds of developmental students and their teachers, ethnography requires the methodical study of the ways in which classroom actors make sense and meaning of their world as it is present in social action or behavior (Erickson, 1986). Immersing in the world of my research participants enabled me to build a holistic picture of their experiences, and warrants this research methodology.

Ethnographers are less concerned with predicting what comes next and instead are concerned with understanding what has just occurred (Agar, 1996; Erickson, 1986). Ethnography focuses on the differences that appear when an expectation is not met, particularly when "one's assumption of perfect coherence is violated" (Agar, 1986, p. 20). In this way, ethnography has the potential to produce theory. This approach allows for the "development of new theories about causes" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121) and identification of casual links which are not made evident by experimental methods. As these findings are drawn from a specific study, the development of theory can be applicable to similar studies, given that ethnography provides for added depth which may translate outcomes across contexts. This is in and of itself, an important intervention necessary to formulate an understanding of developmental reading education, its scope and range in assisting students to be successful in their college studies.

Central to ethnography enterprise is the participant observational approach to the study of culture and social action (Erickson, 1986; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). By employing a participant observational approach, I seek to collect data that, after systematic analysis, sheds light on deeper understanding of developmental reading education. Researchers, employing an ethnographic approach, study behavior in their natural settings,

and strive to interpret phenomenon in the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This approach allows for a description of what happens in the setting, and explicates how the people involved see their own behaviors and those of others within the contexts in which such actions takes place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

The literature on developmental education hypothesizes but does not describe how it may or may not be beneficial to student academic success in college. Through my account, I document whether and how such course of study is of academic consequence to students. This knowledge should be of paramount concern to developmental reading practitioners as the number of students participating in remedial reading education continues to climb in all segments of higher education.

3.3 Research Design

Employing an interpretive approach to the analysis of developmental education, I conducted a study of its curriculum at a community college situated in a border community. I specifically examined the reading curriculum that was enacted over the eight week period in which it was offered. Following the conventional data collection strategies of ethnography, I designed my study with classroom observation, participant interviews and document analysis as my primary methods of data collection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Analysis focused on

the intricacies of students' daily classroom lives and roles (Erickson, 1986), which is often missing in studies using survey data and large scale assessments.

3.4 Data Collection Strategies

Like other classroom research within the interpretivist tradition, (Cohen, 1990; Erickson, 1986; Hartell, 2012; Mendez, 2010; Page, 1991; Page, 1999) my aim was to portray what developmental education is in practice. As this was an ethnographic case study, I also drew upon various sources of information in order to create a detailed account of the experiences of students and faculty. The data collection strategies comprise of classroom observations, participant interviews and written documents. Such techniques of ethnographic design allow for an "insider account" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 124) of the lives of students and teachers. These strategies allowed me to capture the words as they occurred during classroom interaction.

3.4.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation is a strategy of data collection with roots in ethnographic research. The term participant-observation signifies one who is present at the research site as much as possible and throughout the duration of the study. The researcher records all accounts and observations as field notes which are then transcribed. This includes formal and informal

conversations and interactions with the study participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The technique is unique as the researcher approaches participants in their own setting rather than requiring the participants reach out to the researcher.

3.4.2 Classroom Observation

I began my participant observations in October 2011, when the reading course commenced. I attended all the classes, which totaled 24 class sessions. Using a digital recorder, I recorded all classroom lessons and activities, three times a week, for a total of 48 hours. I also took extensive field notes during each classroom meeting. The classroom participant observations focused on the interactions between students and their instructor, as well as the enacted reading curriculum. My observations were completed in a manner that avoided interfering with the normal activities of the students. I sat in the back of the classroom, observing the classroom lessons, while taking many field notes. In addition to the formal instruction of the reading course, I was also focusing on how teaching and learning was enacted by participants through their everyday practices.

I observed the entire course from the beginning of the eight week semester to document a variety of lessons and faculty and student interactions. This allowed me to look for repeated or unique behaviors that would permit me to construct

preliminary grounds from which I could further probe during the participant interviews (Agar, 1996; Erickson, 1986).

Observational data helped me understand this enacted layer of curriculum. Often, the enacted curriculum or the curriculum in use differs from the curriculum on paper (Cohen, 1990; Hartell, 2012; Mendez, 2010; Page, 1991; Page, 1999). Therefore, my objective was to document and learn how these participants in a developmental reading course negotiated the curriculum within this cultural context. Additionally, these insider accounts encompassed classroom interaction, the delivery of lessons and students' response to those lessons. Such data also allowed me to document and offer an analysis of what remedial reading courses entail in practice at this particular college. It also provided me with a clearer understanding of what it means to be a student in remedial reading education, as well as the processes involved with teaching students to improve their literacy skills.

3.5 Participant Interviews

Combining observational data with participant interviews allows for the data from each source to illuminate the other (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Thus, as a qualitative researcher employing an ethnographic design, my goal was to elicit discourse using guiding research questions. The data that emerged from these interviews are rich. They allude to

educational experiences, and the meanings they attribute to these lived experiences. In general, this afforded an explication of how people experience curriculum and clarified meaning with regard to action.

I chose to conduct interviews with students that were currently enrolled in developmental reading education, thus identifying their perspectives while students were in the process of experiencing remedial reading. Because the interviews occurred as the semester progressed, I was able to recognize areas of discrepancy among the curriculum on paper and the curriculum in practice. These discontinuities were discussed during the interviews. During interviews, I employed a series of semi-structured and structured questionnaires for data generation. Additionally, the interviews were structured in an open-ended style that provided for more direction, choice and input during the interview process (Spradley, 1979). The interviews focused on their accounts of being students engaged in the process of learning how to become better readers of college texts.

I also interviewed Mr. Mercado who was tasked with teaching students how to develop their reading skills to meet the reading demands in college. The interviews from Mr. Mercado illuminated his perspectives on teaching college reading. They also

illustrate the meaning behind his interpretation and practice of the reading curriculum within his own classroom.

The interviews varied in length depending on the participant with most lasting approximately 30 minutes. With the participants' knowledge and consent, the interviews were digitally recorded, to facilitate reporting data as accurately as possible. All formal interviews were conducted individually in a vacant office, allowing for privacy. In addition, I also engaged in several informal conversations with the participants to generate data and clarify information on the events that occurred within the classroom setting.

3.5.1 Student Interviews

I conducted three structured interviews with each student and questioning routes were developed for each interview. The student interviews took place at different times in the semester. The purpose of the first interview was to learn about the students' educational background, personal goals and aspirations and their educational experiences within high school and the community college. We also discussed the students' prior reading experiences, both positive and negative, how they saw themselves as remedial readers in college, and their expectations for their reading class. I explored these topics within the context of remedial education and the community

college. The first interview occurred during the second week of class.

The second interview centered on the students' perspectives and experiences in their developmental reading course. I further explored their perspectives of the remedial course by asking about their reading lessons. I focused on the meaning attributed to the reading strategies taught in class, their course assignments, and their current opinions of themselves as readers. The second interview occurred during the fifth week of class.

The third interview focused on students' perspectives of how their experience in remedial reading might impact their educational goals and aspirations. I probed on how students viewed the upcoming spring semester to be in terms of reading demand and whether they felt prepared to meet those demands. I also gathered information on students' overall perspectives and experiences in developmental reading. I was also interested on how they viewed their overall reading behaviors and practices from when they first began their reading course. The third interview occurred during the last week of class.

3.5.2 Instructor Interviews

I also conducted two interviews with Mr. Mercado, the course instructor. Following a similar format to the student interviews, I explored his perspectives and experiences in

helping underprepared college students improve their reading abilities. I probed on questions about his teaching methods to get a clearer understanding of his practice. These interviews were also digitally recorded and partially transcribed and occurred during the second week and last week of class.

3.6 Written Documentation

Written accounts can also complement other data sources in the field (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The written documents utilized for this ethnographic study are derived from three sources: state guidelines for developmental reading curriculum, institutional documents and local program specific information. Written documents are also enormously valuable in a qualitative study as they "ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 126).

The state guidelines for developmental education are provided via the Lower Division ACGM. This document provides the official list of approved numbers for general academic transfer courses that are funded by the state of Texas and offered by public community and technical colleges. ACGM also provides an outline of the techniques covered in remedial reading courses in addition to an explanation of the fundamental reading skills to be covered in such courses.

Institutional documents serve to provide background information about the college environment, documentation of

college and student demographics, and information on academic standards. These sources include the community college catalog, the schedule of classes and online institutional descriptions found on the community college website. The written documents are a representation of the formal curriculum at Mountain View.

Program specific documents serve to explicate the institutional version of the developmental reading curriculum. These documents include the official course description, the instructor's course requirements and developmental reading course syllabus, the course quizzes and exams, student handouts, books and materials used and samples of students' work. In summary, these written documents represent the translation of the formal curriculum from the state to the local level.

3.7 Sample

Because of my specific focus on the experiences of students and faculty in developmental education, I followed a selective sampling procedure (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). As Patton (1990) also suggests, purposeful sampling provides rich information that manifest the phenomenon intensely. Selective sampling must be continuously monitored and is a process that must match the research problem.

As a faculty member at Mountain View Community College, I developed working relationships with many of the reading faculty members and the instructional dean overseeing the reading

discipline. I was granted permission by the instructional dean to observe in the reading class I studied, as well as by the instructor charged with teaching *Advanced College Reading*. My selection was purposeful as I was interested in observing the enactment of the reading curriculum at a community college setting.

I chose to observe Mr. Mercado's classroom because in many ways it represents the reading classes found throughout Mountain View Community College. Like most other classes at Mountain View, *Advanced College Reading* was taught during an eight week semester. The course was one of approximately 50 sections offered during the fall 2011 semester at Mountain View.

In regards to instruction, *Advanced College Reading* also exhibited characteristics of other reading classes taught at Mountain View Community College. At Mountain View, most of the reading sections are taught by adjunct instructors. That is, they are untenured and employed part-time by the college. Those instructors that are tenured or on tenure-track often teach upwards of six to seven sections per semester, with 27 students enrolled per section. Most instructors do not hold a master's degree in reading, nor are they experts on literacy. Additionally, given the amount of students per section, instructors at Mountain View also tend to use the same textbook, syllabus, course assignments and exit exam materials. Moreover,

there is also little permanency given the extensive use of part-time faculty in the reading discipline. Perhaps as a result of the heavy course load and use of adjunct faculty, *Advanced College Reading* was also regarded by students as an easy, undemanding course that could be completed in a relatively short amount of time.

The students were enrolled in a one semester reading course due to their scores on the college placement exam, called the Accuplacer. English as Second Language (ESL) learners were excluded from the study because this would have added an additional layer of complexity to the analysis of the problem under investigation. Individual students were selected as their perspectives led to better understanding of their experiences and allowed for better theorizing about a larger collection of cases (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). During the course of this study, participants were all freshman students, this having been their first semester of college. I chose students currently engaged in a developmental reading course which allowed for documentation and study of their experiences as developmental college readers at the community college setting.

The students in *Advanced College Reading* also reflected the demographics of Mountain View Community College. For instance, of the students participating in this study, all were on financial aid, meaning they required monetary assistance to pay

for college. They too were first generation students, and self-identified as being Hispanic. As recipients of financial aid, they were considered low income and heralded from working class families that lived near the college campus. They had aspirations ranging from becoming a dental assistant to entering medical school. One had earned his General Equivalency Diploma, and the remaining students had recently graduated from high school. Additionally, there were three males, and three females in my sample. Though, there tends to be more females accessing and succeeding in college, for this study, the sample was equally divided by gender.

To deepen my knowledge of developmental education, my sample also included a faculty member, Mr. Mercado. Mr. Mercado taught the reading course under observation and holds a Master of Arts degree in Applied Linguistics. He has extensive experience teaching students underprepared for reading. His account yielded valuable data on remedial education, and provided insight into his role as developmental educator. At the time of the study, he was a full time faculty member on tenure track and teaching six sections during the fall 2011 semester. However, he was recently granted tenure at Mountain View Community College. I observed Mr. Mercado as he conducted his class throughout the semester, which allowed me to describe the details of practice and the enactment of remedial reading.

I began my collection of data during the fall of 2011, as the remedial reading course commenced mid-October. Towards the end of the first day of class, the instructor allowed me ten minutes to discuss my research project. I briefly explained that I was conducting a study of developmental reading curriculum, and I asked for volunteers to participate in my study. Initially, ten students among a class of 27 students agreed to take part in my research project, but ultimately six students participated in the study.

This study took place over an eight week period during the fall 2011 semester. The course under observation was considered a minimester course, meaning it was taught over an eight week period as compared to a standard 16 week semester course. On a typical schedule, the class met Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. My observations allowed me to garner a better understanding of the reading course, and document the meaning the classroom participants attributed to the curriculum.

There are various developmental courses offered at Mountain View, to include developmental math, developmental writing, and developmental reading. The course that I focused on is titled *Advanced College Reading*. The course is designed to teach students reading skills that will allow them to read and understand college texts. The course is developmental in that is

does not counts towards graduation, or accumulation of credits. Additionally, successful completion of the course is measured using an exit reading level of 12th grade. This specific reading course also serves as a prerequisite to many credit bearing courses at Mountain View.

3.8 Data Analysis

In my analysis, I provide a description of the knowledge that is produced in a classroom in order to illustrate how a particular institution teaches students with reading deficiencies. My portrayal also looks into the experiences of students that struggle to improve their reading comprehension skills. In elaborating an analysis of developmental education, I was guided by a body of theory in curriculum that conceives of it as a multi-layered approach. In particular, I drew from Cohen (1990), Hartell (2012), Mendez (2010), Page (1991), Page (1999), Schwab (1969) and Sizer (1999). Thus, I focus on several aspects of the reading curriculum at Mountain View, but most specifically on the three layers of curriculum: the formal, the enacted and experienced curriculum. To illuminate the localized version of curriculum and its theoretical construction, an examination of all three layers of curriculum is warranted (Erickson, 1986).

3.8.1 Formal Curriculum

Higher education institutions attempt to define educational standards and set expectations by specifying a curriculum. Along with educational content, the formal curriculum also informs the teaching practices of faculty members and how that curriculum is enacted in daily lessons (Page, 1991; Page, 1999). Hence, curriculum encompasses the concepts of the formal or intended curriculum, or the knowledge that students are formally expected to acquire in schooling.

According to Schwab (1969), the purpose of curriculum is to "discriminate the right ideas" (p.7), how these ideas could best be learned, and in what order and when they should be taught. Such ideas are guided by the objectives set forth by those who determine the formal curriculum, and are typically grounded in theory. Such theoretical knowledge, however, is often unconnected or very restrictive in regards to the subject under examination. Because curriculum deals with human beings, social science theory struggles to account for this variability and complexity. Furthermore, much of the process of curriculum development lacks theoretical connection.

The formal curriculum is not based on abstract representations, and is instead characterized by concrete artifacts or classroom components. It represents what students are to learn and is typically referred to as the explicit content knowledge students are to acquire (Page, 1991; Page,

1999). In fact, in classrooms, the course textbook is the most common manifestation of the formal curriculum. However, the formal curriculum, expressed in written documents, is enacted by teachers in daily lessons and classroom activities, and subject to negotiation and interpretation (Spindler & Spindler, 1982). In fact, teachers are the link between the formal curriculum and the students who are exposed to such knowledge.

The formal curriculum informs the ways in which lessons unfold. These particular acts are brought to bear in the classroom setting, and among learners and teachers. Yet, what unfolds in the classroom often differs from the theoretical representations underpinning such curriculum (Schwab, 1969). Subsequently, social and behavioral theories take hold of different aspects of a subject and treat it differently, applying newly discovered principles along the way. Thus, to advance curriculum efforts in the field of education, what is paramount is to know "what is and has been going on in American schools" (Schwab, 1969, p. 15). This examination encompasses the successes and failures of the curriculum under investigation, and its instruction in the school setting.

3.8.2 Enacted Curriculum

Sizer (1999) argues that what counts in school settings in regards to curriculum is actually what kids and teachers do, as opposed what is formally stated in the written curriculum. The

meaning and experience behind such lessons is inadequately considered when schools organize their curriculum, often resulting in a lack of coherence among subjects. The teachers ultimately determine children's learning, as they determine what will and will not happen in their own classrooms. Thus, teachers are developers of the enacted curriculum, constituted by the experiences within their classroom practice. Teachers interpret the curriculum to students, and the lessons they provide are interpretations of knowledge filtered through their own values and norms (Page, 1991; Page, 1999; Wolcott, 1990). Moreover, teachers use classroom materials differently, and it is imperative to uncover the processes by which teachers make decisions on their classroom lessons.

The curriculum in action also represents the daily face to face interactions among classroom actors (Schwab, 1969). The enactment of the formal curriculum is further influenced by the perspectives and meanings of classroom actors, hence students and teachers, within a classroom setting (Erickson, 1986). Thus, the enacted curriculum focuses on the relationships between students and their teachers, which are socially constructed (Spindler & Spindler, 1982).

Curriculum should be more than delivery (Sizer, 1999), and must encompass "what is remembered, understood, used and enjoyed" (p.163), by children. Curriculum materials often focus

on the finished product of teaching, rather than on the teaching process. Curriculum cannot be thought of as what should be covered, and instead should signal to how students use this knowledge, and how they acquire the habit of its use. How the formal curriculum is interpreted and enacted by teachers to students is jointly constructed by participants (Page, 1991; Page, 1999). Thus, examining what happens in classrooms must account for the rich differences in students, and describe the complex interactions of classroom actors to better inform the analysis of student learning.

3.8.3 Experienced Curriculum

In her study of curriculum differentiation in high schools Page (1991) and (1999), portrays the experienced curriculum, and provides glimpses of the curriculum in action. Page focuses on the curriculum as experienced by the teacher and learner and the knowledge that such curriculum provides. The enacted curriculum documents how students talk about their teachers and their experiences in classrooms. Students' interpretations of the enacted curriculum are indicative of the meanings made in classroom settings (Metz, 1978). Such analysis encompasses students' discourse about the curriculum in action, and explores the consequences of such curriculum.

What a curriculum means and what it means to be a student or teacher are socially constructed (Spindler & Spindler, 1982).

Hence, what the curriculum means on paper is not necessarily what it means to classroom actors. The formal curriculum is given meaning based on the interaction between teachers, their students, and classroom tasks (Erickson, 1986; Page, 1991; Sizer, 1999). Page (1991) asserts that curriculum comes alive through the classroom interactions among students and teachers. Therefore, the messages contained in the formal curriculum may be one way in which lessons are understood in the classrooms, however, what curriculum means in writing, is not necessarily what it means to classroom actors.

In my study of developmental reading education, I too focus on such perspectives. By studying closely its classroom enactments, I seek to learn what remedial education means and teaches to those who experience it more directly: students and teachers. Often missing from college based research is the personal voice of developmental reading class students and their teachers. In this way, I provide a detailed account of what developmental education means to its practitioners. I specify the different forms of knowledge that developmental reading education provides to students found to be underprepared in reading. Investigating the perspectives of students and teachers provides for more meaningful data on the experienced curriculum and the significance of knowledge that such course of study provides. Their words and actions illuminate the curriculum

experienced in a localized version of developmental reading education.

3.9 Interpretive Analysis

In the process of analyzing my data, and employing a theoretical interpretive approach, I endeavor to comprehend a social world that is "continuously in the process of constructing" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 41). Within this purview, data analysis is iterative and a recursive process (Agar, 2004). Inherent in the process of data analysis within interpretive research, is the chance that one's interpretations are but one of many different interpretations and stories that could be explicated within the same data set (Agar, 1996).

Wolcott (1990) states that research involves taking pains not to get it all wrong, while being suspicious that one is not "quite getting it right" (p. 29). Although unpredictable, human interaction is patterned (Erickson, 1986; Geertz, 1973). Thus, the purpose of interpretive research is to note and catalog the details of human interaction, and also to systematically look for the patterns that may exist, within even the smallest of details.

Given my interest in documenting and analyzing developmental reading education as it is practiced, I focus on the curriculum in place. "For classroom research this means discovering how the choices and actions of all the members

constitute an enacted curriculum" (Erickson, 1986, p. 129). The enacted curriculum often differs from the curriculum prescribed by Mountain View or expressed by the students and teachers as being in force. This allowed me to illuminate how faculty attempted to engage students in the process of improving reading ability. At the same time, being attentive to the enacted curriculum allows me to offer a description of the complexity of developmental reading education.

Student's interpretations of developmental education also provide an understanding of their experience in this context. Given that the literature does not specify how developmental reading courses may be beneficial or detrimental to students, presenting their perspective was illuminating to this question. How students make meaning of their reading courses and how this impacts their college experience was another important thread missing in the literature and I was able to address this gap in my study.

3.10 Subjectivity

Interpretive research is guided by the "researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). As with most research, this study was shaped by my own perspective: the setting and selected research participants, the data collected, the questions asked and my conclusions and interpretations.

However, fundamental in qualitative research is recognizing the impact of subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) asserts that researchers must actively seek out their own subjectivity while their study is in progress, and recognize how it impacts their interpretations and lines of inquiry. Recognizing one's own subjectivity is also critical to the quality of the work completed (LeCompte, 1987).

Peshkin (1988) proposes "enhanced awareness that should result from a formal, systematic monitoring of self" (p. 20). In fact, ethnographers are neither objective, nor subjective, but instead, reflexive. Reflexivity necessitates the direct observation of action, and interpretations of meaningfulness and significance of actions held by the actors (Erickson, 1986). This self-awareness can assist researchers in managing subjectivity, as "untamed subjectivity mutes the emic voice" (Erickson, 1986, p. 21).

Preconceived notions can add to the researcher's understanding of the subject matter. As a faculty member at Mountain View, I was familiar with the reading course under study, as I often advised students into the course based on their exam scores. In my case, my personal experiences as a student and employee of the community college under study also facilitated my analysis and understanding of the contexts at hand. I also believe that my personal educational experiences

have heightened my attentiveness and sensitivity to the challenges students face in their pursuit of a college education. This realization is important as Maxwell (1992) purports that the recognition that one's own beliefs and varying experiences shape the researcher's accounts of the data and ultimately, the analysis and interpretations reached.

3.11 Validity

The place of subjectivity raises particular issues of the question of validity and generalizability. Upholding validity involves employing certain procedures that ensure trustworthiness of data and lessen the effects of "personal bias upon the logic of evidence" (Kamarovsky, 1981 as cited in Lather, p. 65, 1986). Such procedures include recording of how researchers' assumptions affect the logic of data, establishing categories and analysis via a sample of subjects and recording that the research has affected change and transformation (Lather, 1986).

Making sense of the data is the primary focus of ethnographic analysis and that is mostly achieved through "theoretical triangulation or approaching data with multiple perspectives and hypotheses" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 214). Triangulation of evidence should support a discovery by displaying that independent processes (employing a variety of sources, using various approaches, obtaining support by various

investigators) come to an understanding or do not dispute a finding. Ideally it provides a validity check. As I sought to ground the concept of developmental education by detailing how it actually exists in practice and with what outcomes, triangulation in my analysis allowed me to address validity and answer the questions about curriculum, culture, and classrooms I set out to investigate.

According to Erickson (1986), validity in interpretive research is also based on whether the researcher is able to capture "the immediate and local meanings of actions" (p. 119) of the participants under study. With a qualitative approach, validity is derived from the analysis of the data itself and is based on the accurate portrayal and description of events that have occurred in the setting under study (Maxwell, 1992). Descriptive validity entails the accuracy of the account, and is supported with the recording of field notes and transcribing of interviews. Interpretive validity is concerned with the meaning behind the behaviors and perspectives of participants under observation (Maxwell, 1992).

In qualitative research, validity encompasses recognizing the degree to which researchers' assertions about knowledge resemble actuality (Peshkin, 1988). Wolcott (1990) asserts that interpretive research does not involve assuring objectivity, as all research is filtered through the minds of the researcher.

Thus, validity is different in interpretive research than experimental research. Essentially, validity refers not to the data but to the inferences drawn from them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Patton (1990) contends that the "validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 185). Finally, the multiplicity of data collection strategies is designed to provide a system of checks and balances to safeguard that my vision was not clouded by my own biases, and that I actually investigated what I set out to study.

I also reflected on my interpretations, and considered alternative conclusions, given the amount of data collected and analyzed. I ensured that the words I recorded and the activities I transcribed were accurately portrayed (Maxwell, 1992). This includes grounding my account via direct quotes from classroom actors, and portraying the language used by my study participants. These strategies served to ensure factual evidence of my account under observation.

3.12 Generalizability

Though ethnographic research is empirical, it is not positivist. Positivism fails to take into consideration variation across classrooms and instead is concerned with reliability of

measurements. Thus, though positivist research looks for general characteristics that can be replicated within both similar and dissimilar settings, interpretive research looks for "concrete universals, arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cases studied in equally great detail" (Erickson, 1986, p. 130). These universals serve to differentiate from that which can be generalized to similar situations, to that which is unique. The aim of ethnography is particularizability instead of generalizability (Erikson, 1986). Thus, in my study developmental education classrooms are viewed as unique systems, but ones that also display universal properties along with variation from one classroom to the next.

Generalizability in interpretive research lies in understanding how multiple research studies contribute to a general understanding of the meaning of certain cultures or phenomena (Geertz, 1973). In this process, generalizability is obtained through analogy (Erickson, 1986). The researcher gains an understanding via the thorough examination of the details of the setting under study. Instead of seeking a large sample size, generalizability is dependent on situational factors that make each interaction and setting unique. What is found in the specific details of that context is universally applicable to interactions of the same kind (Erickson, 1986).

It is from valid description that generalizing can be derived, whether it is to other similar studies or to other studies outside the same setting (Maxwell, 1992). Thus, generalizability is possible both within and beyond the groups studied. Generalizability is also rendered using "thick description" (p. 26), as discussed by Gertz (1973), which is described as the accurate and complete interpretation of what the researcher sees and hears. I thickly describe the reading lessons, providing readers with a vivid recounting of classroom life and describe how curricular meanings are constructed in classrooms. I strive to describe the specifics of practice and meanings behind such action and gain an understanding via the thorough examination of the details in the classrooms setting. I also provide interview data to further document how the research participants have understood classroom events. In my data analysis, I make every effort to portray a "thick description" of the curriculum and classroom participants under study. Readers of this study may find common meanings in these research outcomes and I submit that some generalizability of my study is possible. Such issues of generalizability will be discussed in the conclusions of my study, given the insightfulness ethnography approaches provide to studies of classrooms and curriculum.

3.13 Setting

My study takes place at Mountain Community College located in a southwestern state on the U.S.-Mexico border. Mountain View Community College is situated in a large city that comprises a primarily Hispanic population. In 2010, the U.S. census reported a population of 800,657 persons of which 82.2% were identified as Hispanic origin. In regards to educational attainment, approximately 54% of the population ages 25 plus have a high school diploma. Additionally, only 19% of the population within the same age bracket held a bachelor's degree.

Mountain View Community College was established in 1971 with a student body of just 901 students. By 2010-11, the college's enrollment for academic year was 30,847 credit students (Mountain View, Office of Institutional Research). Mountain View provides both traditional academic and career programs and its student population ranges from recent high school graduates to returning adult students. As the majority of Mountain View students live in the surrounding area, the college serves a community that has a low educational attainment. Additionally, over 80% of students are on federal financial aid. This statistic also mirrors the community at large, as the median household income reported by the U.S. Census (2010) was \$36,333 with 25.6% of the population living at below poverty level.

Mirroring the wider community, Mountain View is also considered a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), where total Hispanic enrollment is made up of a minimum of 25% of the overall enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). As with most HSIs, many Mountain View students are considered low socioeconomic status and are first generation college students. Mountain View has also experienced a growth in student enrollment, which reflects the overall trend at community colleges nationwide. According to Weiss, Visher and Washington (2010), community colleges have seen a surge in enrollments of over 700% since 1963.

The community college has seven campuses and adheres to an open admissions policy allowing higher education opportunities for students that may not meet admission requirements at a four year university. Mountain View Community College is among the fastest growing community colleges in the U.S. and is one of the largest grantors of two year degrees to Hispanic students. Mountain View currently offers 130 programs of study from which students can select. While many students enroll in technical and vocational educational programs, the majority of students expect to receive the academic preparation to enable them to enroll in a four year program. Yet, less than 30% actually transfer to a university upon completion of their associate's degree (Mountain View, Office of Institutional Research).

The study body is made up of 59.3% female and 40.7% male with the median age at 21 yrs. Eighty six percent of students attending the college are Hispanic and eight percent of the student population is White. Approximately 60% of students are enrolled part time at Mountain View Community College and the majority of students commute from home. Mountain View is a commuter college, meaning it does not provide general student housing.

At Mountain View Community College, over 95% of new students test into at least one developmental course (Mountain View Fact Book, 2006). Therefore, there are numerous full time and adjunct faculty members at the college that are designated to teach underprepared students. Faculty in developmental education must have a bachelor's degree in a field which must be applicable to their teaching responsibilities, as well as have experience teaching in a related field or graduate work or in developmental education. If the bachelor's degree is not in a related discipline, then instructors must hold at least 18 graduate credits in a field related to their teaching duties (Mountain View Fact Book, 2006).

The classroom that I observed was held in a one story building at Mountain View. This particular branch campus is situated near a mountainous and desert area. The campus itself houses approximately 3,700 students, most which live near the

campus. The campus provides a variety of student services to students, to include an admissions office, a financial aid office, counseling services, a testing site and an office for veterans. There is also a bookstore, library and computer lab for students. There are numerous full time and adjunct faculty members present at the campus, as well as two campus administrators.

Over the past 20 years, the campus has served an increasing number of academically underprepared college students. Attrition and graduation rates have recently come under much scrutiny by the state legislature. This has driven the college to implement new programs to improve persistence and retention rates among students. Additionally, because of the high enrollment of underprepared students, Mountain View Community College was an ideal site to study developmental education.

3.14 Developmental Education Program

Advanced College Reading, like other developmental reading courses at Mountain View, is shaped by changing state mandates. In 1987, the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) was implemented by the state legislature which mandated testing, advising and remediation for all incoming college students, as well as program evaluation, and improved accountability measures. This led to a huge growth in the demand for remediation across the state of Texas. Given this surge in

enrollment and changes in state funding, the state legislature has recently moved towards mandating that providers of developmental education find ways to expedite the process of remediating underprepared college students. This sense of urgency and pressure on colleges has shaped and influenced the curriculum that is designed and implemented in the developmental education courses.

Mountain View Community College has also recently hired a new college president, and he too has implored the college faculty charged with remediating students to accelerate college readiness. Hence, the creation of minimester sections has surged as faculty attempt to catch students up to their college ready peers in a short amount of time. Thus, this imperative manifested in the particular version of developmental education that students and their instructor produced.

Because of state mandates, all students entering Mountain View Community College must complete the Accuplacer entrance exam. The Accuplacer exam tests students in three subjects, reading, writing and math. Based on the exam results, students are identified as college ready, or in need of remediation. Currently, the developmental program at Mountain View provides developmental reading, math and writing courses to address the remedial needs of entering students.

In regards to reading, the developmental reading courses are neither credit bearing, nor do they factor into the grade point averages of students. Three developmental reading courses are provided for students found to be underprepared in this academic arena, and they include READ 0001, READ 0002 and READ 0003. Students must earn a grade of C or better to progress through their remedial reading courses, or they must retake the placement exam to test out of remedial courses. Students who earn a 78 or better score are exempt from enrolling in developmental reading education, and are deemed college ready in the area of reading.

The developmental reading course under observation for this study was READ 0003 or *Advanced College Reading* which serves as the exit course for the reading discipline. I chose to study *Advanced College Reading* because it requires an exit reading level of approximately 12th grade for successful completion of the class. Thus, it is assumed that underprepared students who pass this course can then read at the college credit level, and able to comprehend college texts.

The highest non-credit bearing reading course is considered a co-requisite for most content level credit bearing courses. This allows some students to accumulate some credits while completing remedial courses. However, there are also several courses at Mountain View, such as history and government, which

prohibit students in developmental reading from enrolling until the student has successfully passed their reading course. Upon earning a grade of C or better, students are allowed to enroll for any credit bearing courses. Students are not mandated to retake the Accuplacer exam upon completing their remedial reading course.

3.15 The Classroom

Twenty seven students were enrolled in the remedial reading course which was housed in a small classroom. The classroom was located in a long hallway near other classrooms, and in close proximity to the faculty offices. The classroom had 30 student desks and chairs, an overhead projector, and a chalkboard. The walls were bare, painted white, and the classroom had one big window that looked out to a patio often used by faculty for smoke breaks. There was also a podium and a large desk towards the front of the classroom, where Mr. Mercado normally provided instruction.

3.15.1 The Classroom Climate

The classroom atmosphere was relaxed and informal. Mr. Mercado often delivered a joke to begin class, or he would comment that the late students owed him a subway sandwich. Students greeted each other when they arrived, often sharing books and the assigned text. Mr. Mercado initially mentioned that students were required to purchase the assigned text, or

they would be dropped from the course. However, about three students did not purchase the book, and they routinely asked to share the text with their classmates. Attendance was taken daily, but despite the number of absences some students accrued, no one was dropped from the course.

Mr. Mercado routinely began his lessons with short lectures, though he did not always deliver them from the front of the room. At times, he would walk towards the back of the classroom or around the clusters of students when they were engaged in group activities. In fact, group activities were a daily ritual in Mr. Mercado's course. This was a central feature of the classroom climate. He did lecture, but often he encouraged group discussions and group work, to engage students during his lessons. He did not demonstrate an authoritarian style, and his laid back demeanor instead produced a positive and easy going climate.

3.15.2 Students

The students in the reading class ranged from ages 18 to 24. All of the students were freshman, and were enrolled for their first semester at Mountain View. Of the 27 students, 15 were female, and 12 were male. The majority were also Hispanic students, and first generation, meaning the first in their family to pursue a college education. Many of the students also

spoke Spanish, with a few transitioning from Mountain View's English as a Second Language program.

The students in *Advanced College Reading* were well behaved, and did not tend to interrupt the daily classroom activities. They did as they were told by Mr. Mercado, without much objection. Students followed his instructions regarding in class assignments and group activities. I did not see any signs of dislike for Mr. Mercado, but instead did see signs of boredom during class. Several students would fall asleep during class, lay their heads on the table, or appear to be daydreaming. At times, Mr. Mercado would reprimand students, but other times he would ignore their behavior.

3.15.3 The Instructor

I would not describe Mr. Mercado as a disciplinarian; instead, his teaching style was laid back. Though class was scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m., class normally started a few minutes late, as students waited for Mr. Mercado to begin his lessons. Additionally, several students routinely walked in late to class, often up to 20 minutes after the scheduled start time. Though, at times, Mr. Mercado reprimanded students for their tardiness, they were never denied entrance into class.

As his primary focus was on helping students pass the reading exit exam, Mr. Mercado focused much of his lessons on the skills that were found on the exam. He embedded the

importance of the reading exit exam among his daily lessons. He also moved briskly from topic to topic given the time constraints of the class and the amount of material found in the course text. This rapid pace of instruction and overarching emphasis on the exit exam led to a course that provided lessons which ultimately averted reading.

3.16 Research Questions

It was in this informal classroom context that through employing an interpretive research methodology, I studied the developmental reading curriculum in its layered form. By looking at the formal curriculum, I sought to document and analyze how it shapes classroom life. Furthermore, I also studied the enacted curriculum to describe what it means to be a student and teacher in developmental reading education. Finally, I examined the experienced curriculum, particularly among students, and asked what its import was to the academic futures of underprepared college readers.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CURRICULUM ON PAPER

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I document the formal reading curriculum of the *Advanced College Reading* course at Mountain View Community College. The formal curriculum is comprised of several written documents, including the catalog description, the syllabus and the assigned course textbook. A key tension in my analysis concerns an overarching emphasis on the procedural matters of the course, with little attention devoted to its academic content or course objectives. Additionally, though the official course syllabus identifies ambitious course objectives, the formal curriculum prescribes a limited number of resources with which the learning would occur. My analysis further shows a discrepancy of how the educational activities prescribed in the formal curriculum were too advance college reading skills.

4.2 Written Documents

The formal curriculum as manifested through various documents at Mountain View Community College stipulates the educational expectations, content and delivery method to remediate students with demonstrated reading deficiencies. The formal curriculum is divided into the state level mandates and the local level directives. The state level is guided by the requirements set forth by the state of Texas, particularly the Texas Higher Educational Coordinating Board (THECB). THECB is

the agency that oversees all public post-secondary education and the college's reading department. The formal curriculum at the campus level includes two syllabi: the Departmental Course Syllabus and the instructor's course syllabus. These syllabi are shaped by the reading discipline at the community college and Mr. Mercado, the course instructor respectively.

The reading discipline at Mountain View oversaw the reading curriculum and consisted of reading faculty members, a discipline coordinator and an instructional dean. The reading discipline served as a resource for college faculty and members of the community and selected the textbooks for the reading courses offered at Mountain View, generated the reading exit exams, and developed the Departmental Course Syllabus. The discipline also served to establish guidelines and standardized processes for the development of the instructor's course syllabus. The members of the reading discipline meet yearly to review the course objectives, and most recently revised the course in summer 2011.

4.2.1 State Guidelines

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) governs the developmental courses provided by Texas colleges and universities. THECB defines developmental courses as coursework aimed at improving academic deficits to bring students' abilities to a suitable level for admission into higher

education. THECB also publishes the Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual (ACGM), which further specifies the educational content of developmental courses.

The state guidelines outlining the educational objectives for developmental education at Mountain View are provided by the ACGM. The ACGM lists the academic courses that public community colleges may teach and then report for reimbursement of contact hours via state appropriations (ACGM, 2012). The ACGM further specifies that developmental courses may not be offered as college credit, nor can they transfer to other colleges or universities.

Developmental reading courses, while not a course for college credit, were established to address fundamental reading deficiencies found among underprepared college students. According to the ACGM, the skills to be addressed in developmental reading courses include comprehension, vocabulary, and reading rate. However, despite the mandate that colleges provide such courses, the ACGM yet to develop or articulate learning outcomes for developmental reading. Hence, local institutions are designated with the responsibility of determining the learning encounters necessary to develop college reading skills. Because these tasks are left up to the institutions that provide developmental reading courses, the

educational activities and content within these courses vary among colleges.

4.2.2 *The Syllabus*

The *Advanced College Reading* course at Mountain View Community College was shaped by two sets of syllabi, what the discipline calls the Departmental Course Syllabus and the individual instructor's course syllabus. Both syllabi provided students with information on the course content, the evaluation criteria, and the established learning outcomes. The Departmental Course Syllabus specifically spelled out the course objectives, though it does not delve into the day to day educational activities of the course. The instructor's syllabus provided a more detailed picture of the educational encounters that students might experience during the course of the eight week reading class. It specified a class calendar and outlined the course requirements. Thus, both syllabi provided information on what content would be taught, and the activities through which the content was to be delivered.

4.2.3 *Departmental Course Syllabus*

The Departmental Course Syllabus emphasized what the reading discipline deemed was important for teaching Mountain View students college level reading skills. The syllabus was developed in its entirety by the reading discipline, given the wide latitude from the state to define reading courses. The

syllabus articulated the course description from the current college catalog. It also identified the specific course objectives, and provided the evaluation criterion which is applied college-wide. Learning objectives and evaluation criteria were agreed upon by members of the reading discipline. Hence, the curriculum outlined in the syllabus provided guidelines to direct instructors in teaching students the necessary educational content to read and comprehend at the college level.

The Departmental Course Syllabus for *Advanced College Reading* was well organized. It provided the catalog description, course objectives, evaluation standards, a disability statement and information on the six drop rule.

The first section of the syllabus provided the official course description for *Advanced College Reading*. The course description as found in the Mountain View catalog read:

Develops advanced vocabulary and comprehensive skills on both a literal and analytical level. An exit reading level of twelfth grade is required for completion of this course. May not be counted toward graduation. (p. 1)

The course description was succinct and suggested students will acquire college level reading skills. The course description also promoted a broad approach to teaching college reading,

leaving the specifics of the learning outcomes delineated within the course objectives of the Departmental Course Syllabus.

The Departmental Course Syllabus of the *Advanced College Reading* course reflected ambitious course objectives and goals in the second section of the syllabus. These objectives dealt with different aspects of improving college reading comprehension. For instance, the course objectives incorporated several components such as "demonstrating mastery of literal comprehension by extracting, transforming and integrating information into a schematic pattern" and "summarizing and paraphrasing using his/her own words", "demonstrating mastery of critical reading skills" and "demonstrating understanding of aesthetic comprehension" (Departmental Course Syllabus, Fall 2011, p. 1). Embedded in these objectives were additional caveats such as recognizing figurative language and stylistic devices, making inferences and distinguishing propaganda techniques and fact or opinion.

The third section of the Departmental Course Syllabus also provided the evaluation standards for students in *Advanced College Reading*. Indicating the importance of the class, the reading course acted as a gatekeeper to graduation, meaning students could not progress to their college level courses without successful completion of *Advanced College Reading*. To meet the objectives and goals of the *Advanced College Reading*

course, students were also required to pass a reading exit exam. The exit exam was described as being written at a 12th grade reading level. Students who successfully passed the reading exit exam were able to then enroll in credit bearing courses at Mountain View Community College. Those students who did not pass the exit exam could not pass the course, regardless of their overall course grade.

Signaling to a highly structured course, the Departmental Course Syllabus also identified the grading criteria, to include exams, reading assignments and student participation. It also briefly provided information on the grading scale, attendance, reasons for being withdrawn from the course, and addressed student behavior issues and the reinstatement policy at Mountain View. Finally, the last two sections of the Official Course Syllabus discussed students with disabilities and provided information on withdrawing from the course.

The ambitious goals of the *Advanced College Reading* course could be traced on the objectives outlined in the Departmental Course Syllabus. The syllabus expanded on what the catalog description provided students would learn in the reading course. Thus, within an eight week time frame, and upon completion of the course, students were expected to master all these reading skills or course objectives and learn to read and comprehend at

the college level. Successful completion of the course would be assessed via an exit exam as required by the discipline.

The Departmental Course Syllabus described *Advanced College Reading* as a course that was demanding and that would serve to develop students into proficient readers of college texts. With an explication of the seven course objectives, it appeared that students would be engaged in rigorous amount of readings during the course. In fact, the course also purported that successful passage of the reading exit exam would indicate that students could then read at the minimum level of 12th grade, and successfully manage college level texts. Furthermore, the learning goals stated in the Departmental Course Syllabus were on par with course objectives for reading classes provided by other colleges with development reading programs.

4.2.4 *Instructor's Course Syllabus*

Like most instructors who teach the reading course, Mr. Mercado provided students with his own syllabus for *Advanced College Reading*. In addition to his course syllabus, he also provided students with the official syllabus from the reading discipline on the first day of class. Showing consistency between the reading discipline and his expectations, Professor Mercado's syllabus mirrored much of the Departmental Course Syllabus in that it provided information on the academic course

requirements, as well as the evaluation criteria and attendance policies.

According to Mr. Mercado, the purpose of syllabus was to provide students with general and specific information on the reading course. Additionally, the syllabus was meant to lay out what students could expect to learn from participating in developmental reading (Mercado, personal communication, October 2011). Hence, Mr. Mercado's syllabus contained other information, apart from the Departmental Course Syllabus, and was divided into six sections: contact information, required text and materials, course requirements, instructor's policies, attendance and the course calendar.

The first section of the course syllabus was brief and laid out the course number and information on the instructor. Mr. Mercado provided his contact information including his office telephone number, and his email address. He also provided his office hours, and explained that students could set up an appointment with him as well.

The required text for *Advanced College Reading* was titled *The College Reader*, and was selected by the reading discipline. Though Mr. Mercado was not restricted from using other books outside the assigned text, he chose to only assign this text for his course requirements. The syllabus also mandated that students bring their assigned textbook by the third day of class

to fulfill course objectives. Such mandate sought to mitigate, according to Mr. Mercado, the problem of students who tried to get by without buying the book and students who want to share books. Thus, in no uncertain terms, the assigned text was an integral part of the reading course. In fact, sharing of books was not allowed because as he recognized, "*Advanced College Reading* was a college level course" (Mercado, personal communication, October 2011).

The third section of the syllabus, titled "Course Requirements" pointed to a course that was highly reliant on independent student work. This section detailed student expectations in regards to academic dishonesty, homework, exams and make-up work. The syllabus stipulated that students must attend class with all homework assignments, which must be completed on an independent basis. Assignments must also comply with due dates listed in the class calendar. Students were also expected to be present for exams and were responsible for completing any missed evaluations and exams. In reference to the make-up policies, ten points were said to be automatically deducted for late work and would only be accepted up to one week after the original due date. Signaling to the importance of independent student work, the syllabus referenced academic dishonesty, and stated that "cheating, plagiarism and collusion are considered prohibited behaviors and are punishable as

prescribed by the board policies" (Instructor's Course Syllabus, Fall 2011, p. 3).

The instructor's course syllabus also provided students with a description of the grading policy, including the grading scale and the breakdown of percentages required for the final course grade. Performance on exams was considered a reliable means of assessing reading skills and the most objective way to evaluate students (Mercado, personal communication, 2011).

Hence, Mr. Mercado assigned 50% of the course grade to performance on exams, assignments at 10%, portfolios at 25%, lab activities at 10% and attendance at 5%. He closed this section of the syllabus with a statement regarding the administration of a departmental exit exam, by reinforcing the importance of exams in *Advanced College Reading*. However, despite that fact that students were required to earn a C or better on this exam, his syllabus did not provide any additional detail on the exit exam or its overall significance to passing the course, and progressing towards credit bearing college courses.

The course requirements, found in the fourth and fifth sections of the course syllabus provided thorough descriptions of Mr. Mercado's classroom policies. These sections were by far the most developed sections of the syllabus, showing an emphasis on socializing students and appropriate classroom behavior. Contrary to the lack of detail and development on assignments

and educational activities, the focus seemed on classroom management.

Mr. Mercado's course syllabus placed an overarching emphasis on the socialization of students, particularly on controlling classroom behavior, as opposed to the course objectives of *Advanced College Reading*. For example, the course syllabus mentioned that college was for adults, and stated that students must act accordingly and be respectful. There were caveats on harassment, use of cell phones and beepers, cussing, and child care concerns. There were also stern warnings on texting, tardiness, and disruptive behavior. From these warnings, it appeared that Mr. Mercado was strict and concerned with nurturing a structured and disciplined classroom environment. Though his course syllabus provided brief information on the required text, homework and exams and general course requirements, larger sections were solely dedicated to class management regulations. The syllabus continued with such statements as "you are in college, act accordingly, and "if you cannot act like an adult, you will be unsuccessful" (Instructor's Course Syllabus, Fall 2011, p. 4). This emphasis pointed to an interest on socializing and behavior as paramount.

The attendance policy was also detailed in Mr. Mercado's syllabus, pointing to a class where punctuality and attendance was highly valued. The syllabus expressed the importance of

being on time, and stipulated that students would be "denied entrance to the class if tardy." The policy also noted that "students would be withdrawn from the class after six hours of unexcused absences" (Instructor's Course Syllabus, Fall 2011, p. 4) and both absences and excessive tardiness could lead to withdrawal from the course. Additionally, students would earn a grade of F if they failed to attend class after the last day to withdraw.

The information provided in the section titled "Course Calendar" of Mr. Mercado's syllabus was sparse compared to the content that addressed student behavior and attendance. This last section of the syllabus explicated that academic content of the reading course. Both the class calendar and reading portfolios were briefly described for students. For instance, the calendar was divided into eight weeks, and outlined the textbook reading assignments. The titles of the chapters to be reviewed were identified, along with the corresponding page numbers of the assigned text, the dates of quizzes and the due dates of the reading portfolios. However, because such little information was detailed in the class calendar, it was unclear what lessons would unfold throughout the course of the semester.

Instructions on the reading portfolios concluded Mr. Mercado's course syllabus. There he required students to summarize in one paragraph 19 reading passages, 11 from the

textbook and eight readings of the students' choice. The syllabus explained that the reading portfolios were assessed on a scale from one to five using the following benchmarks: summaries, writing clarity, spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary growth and argument analysis in opinion. Though the logs accounted for 25% of the students' grade, it was not stated how these short assignments would improve students' abilities to comprehend college textbooks.

Emphasis on the procedural matters took precedence over the conceptual matters of the reading course. Mr. Mercado's course syllabus highlighted issues of classroom management, including caveats on disruptive behavior, tardiness and cell phone use. He emphasized items that were restricted from class and explicated the consequences of excessive absences. Yet, his course syllabus provided little detail regarding the actual reading knowledge to be addressed during the semester. This omission could be traced in the absence of course objectives that suggested college reading skills would be taught and communicated to students. Because of the lack of detail regarding daily classroom lessons, assignments or activities, it was unclear from the instructor's syllabus what Mr. Mercado would teach, or what students would learn from this course.

4.2.5 Course Textbook

The assigned textbook, entitled *The College Reader* was the sole book assigned for the *Advanced College Reading* courses at Mountain View Community College. Because that text was the only book assigned, it suggested to the important emphasis the reading discipline and Mr. Mercado placed on it. The text was divided into 13 chapters, each with a chapter preview that outlined an overarching reading skill, with accompanying reading strategies to master this skill. A typical chapter in the assigned course textbook provided short reading passages, with either matching, fill in the blank or multiple choice exercises that were provided towards the end of each unit. There were some sections which presented skills in the context of full length articles, but this was atypical. Perhaps because the text was the primary source used by Mr. Mercado, it became the focus of instruction and the central expression of the formal curriculum.

The assigned textbook was mostly concerned with instruction on reading skills. These skills included identifying the main idea and major/minor supporting details, using outlines and concept maps, creating summaries and looking for thought patterns and opinions, and instruction on survey, question, read, recite and review (SQ3R), a method thought to improve reading comprehension. The text purported that mastery of the reading techniques and strategies were necessary for students to become effective college readers, or what the text called,

"master readers." Hence, once students mastered the reading skills espoused in the text, they would be transformed into critical thinkers and efficient readers of college texts.

The College Reader provided practice lessons on different sets of reading skills. For example, each chapter introduced a concept, accompanied by an explanation, then followed by examples and finally, practice exercises. Practice exercises were generally derived from reading passages, mostly between one to four paragraphs, formatted into multiple choice or fill in the blank worksheets. There were also short answer practice exercises, as well as matching exercises.

Because there were no outside reading requirements assigned throughout Mr. Mercado's course, the textbook was the primary focus of instruction. The text mainly centered on instruction of isolated reading skills, which the text purported could transform academically deficient readers into able readers of college texts. For example, textbook skills were included throughout every chapter, which were said to help prepare students for college level textbook reading. Textbooks skills included such strategies as identifying topic sentences, recognizing comparison and contrast concepts and using a highlighter to mark important ideas. They also included tips on previewing graphs, charts and photographs, and looking at visual images and reading their captions. To practice, the text

provided short, fragmented readings and exercises on using textbook skills. Thus, using these textbook skills, students would then be able to comprehend the types of reading found and required in college courses.

In general, *The College Reader* was designed to provide underprepared college readers with reading abilities to be able to read and comprehend at the college level. It provided students examples of basic reading skills, followed by worksheets to apply and practice such skills within reading passages. However, the textbook breaks down the skills into such basic components that it was unclear how comprehensively they could be applied within authentic literary works.

The text also provided instruction in over one hundred different reading skills that would serve to help students become "master readers". Lessons, as stipulated by the textbook, centered on students' ability to apply an inordinate amount of reading skills and strategies, without clear coherence. The vast number of skills were perhaps the reason why topics jumped from synonyms and antonyms, distinguishing fact and opinion, evaluating context, recognizing author's tone and purpose, identifying major and minor details and understanding irony and satire. Hence, the premise was that students would be able to absorb and apply all these skills and use them

effectively to change their reading behavior and improve their comprehension.

The lessons found in *The College Reader* also discouraged engagement and analysis, as evidenced by the short completion tasks found throughout the text. Paragraphs from college textbooks were provided for students to utilize and practice particular reading skills. For example, the text provided a one paragraph excerpt about Stephen King. The paragraph consisted of 10 sentences, each which was numbered, and which described why King was considered a master of dark fiction. It named several of his novels and closed by highlighting some of his literary awards. What followed were 10 multiple choice exercises that asked students to determine whether each statement in the paragraph was a fact, an opinion or a combination. The text did not instruct students to decipher the main idea or summarize the essay or apply any other skills to assist in comprehending the passage. Instead, it only elicited a discrete skill, without delving into the meaning behind the skill. These types of practice exercises were found throughout the text and perplexingly, did not require, nor recommend any follow up reading or writing requirements for students.

There was an underlying focus on isolated reading skills, such as identifying italicized or bolded words or recognizing roots and prefixes, and less on developing comprehensive reading

strategies for deep comprehension and retention of material. Because of the emphasis on reading strategies, the text did not provide for much connected reading, which made it difficult for ensuring that reading experiences were meaningful to students. Applying these disconnected skills in isolation towards lengthy reading assignments might also have proved challenging. Because students were not required to make meaning out of lengthy passages, it was difficult to ascertain whether these strategies could in fact develop students' literary skills and long term comprehension. Problematic was also whether the lessons in the text would be able to achieve the course objectives espoused in the Departmental Course Syllabus.

4.3 Conclusion of Curriculum on Paper

The formal curriculum of the *Advanced College Reading* course signaled to a course with varied course objectives. On one hand, the Departmental Course Syllabus outlined several lofty learning objectives that would be fulfilled upon satisfactory completion of the course. Yet, these ambitious goals centered on the use of a single textbook that provided lessons on discrete and isolated reading skills. On the other hand, Mr. Mercado's course syllabus pointed to a course more concerned with the basic standards of classroom civility and etiquette. Hence, from analyzing the documents of *Advanced*

College Reading, it was unclear how students were to master college reading.

Though the Departmental Course Syllabus of *Advanced College Reading* promised mastery in reading, it was unclear whether this goal could be fulfilled. At least on paper, every course objective would be taught and practiced during the course of semester signaling to a rigorous and demanding course. Students would be able to read and comprehend at the 12th grade level upon successfully completing the class. Their reading comprehension skills would be enhanced on both the literal and analytical level. However, how these objectives were to be achieved with the use of only one text, and were to be accomplished over an eight week period was unclear.

Given that much of the emphasis on the lessons required regurgitation and rote memorization of reading strategies. Practice tests and drilling of students on materials, appeared central to *The College Reader*. Little emphasis was placed on providing students with authentic college level literacy pieces. Hence, the suggestion was that literacy could be mastered using a decontextualized generic text while achieving a set of ambitious and rigorous course objectives.

Because of the conflicting messages from the documents that encompassed *Advanced College Reading*, it was unclear of what academic benefit the course would be for students. The formal

curriculum signaled to different priorities for the course, with significant tension between what the course would teach and how students were to conduct themselves. From analyzing the formal curriculum, the course does not provide sustained opportunities for students to read literary works found in college courses. Thus, to understand whether and how the formal curriculum espoused in *Advanced College Reading* could improve college literacy, I went into classrooms to see the enactment of the developmental reading course.

CHAPTER FIVE: AVERTING THE ACT OF READING IN A READING CLASS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the curriculum in use, or what Schwab (1969) refers to as the enacted curriculum. Studying how the curriculum in use manifested in Mr. Mercado's classroom reveals important aspects about what was taught and what his lessons meant to students. Through the rest of the chapter, I discuss how the manifestations of the formal curriculum contributed to fast paced lessons that lacked depth. Articulated through its interpretation of written documents and made visible in lessons, the reading curriculum and its emphasis on teaching to the test also contributed to averting reading and learning reading all together.

The lessons delivered by Mr. Mercado in *Advanced College Reading* made evident the dilemma between the educational goals of the course and the means to attain those goals. Lessons rendered reading as a set of isolated skills that would be mastered to pass a test and not to be a better reader. Guided by the formal curriculum and the significance of the assessment criteria, Mr. Mercado provided lessons that skimmed though several discrete reading skills at a rapid pace. What resulted were lessons that did not address literacy or comprehension beyond the reading strategies discussed in class. Thus, instruction was largely a matter of delivering the proper skills

to pass the exit exam and cover the large amount of material found in the text and on the formal curriculum.

5.2 Teaching with a Sense of Urgency

Embedded in Mr. Mercado's daily lessons was a sense of urgency. In fact, time constraints during class were addressed in a variety of ways. During lessons, Mr. Mercado often commented they were going to fly through the first few chapters, and jump over pages so it was important to pay attention and keep up. He swiftly moved over large sections in the chapters requiring students to only partially complete the exercises in the book. This sense of urgency carried over throughout his classes and contributed to teaching reading in a prescribed, regimented fashion. What resulted were lessons that averted reading.

Mr. Mercado tried to meet the goals in the formal curriculum by reviewing the numerous reading skills found in the course text, *The College Reader*. For example, during the first three weeks, the following topics were covered: SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite, review), roots, prefixes, suffixes, synonyms, antonyms, general context, context clues, examples, stated main ideas, central ideas, supporting details, topic sentences, thesis statements, concepts maps, outlines and creating summaries from annotations. During the second three weeks, he covered transitions and thought patterns, implied main

ideas, implied central ideas, creating summaries from supporting details, differences between facts and opinions, identifying biased and qualifying words, and evaluating context of a passage. In the final weeks of the course, he covered tone and purpose, subjective and objective words, general purpose in main ideas, recognizing irony, making valid and invalid inferences, the basics of arguments, identifying an author's claim and supports, recognizing fallacies, propaganda techniques, and examining biased arguments. Because it was unusual for students to be assigned homework, there were large amounts of material to review in class over an eight week period. Therefore, to compensate for the time constraints, his lessons introduced reading skills, but often did not elaborate on them.

5.3 Reading Lessons Lacking Depth

Among the first reading skills introduced by Mr. Mercado at the beginning of the eight week semester was a reading process called SQ3R. SQ3R stood for "survey, question, read, recite and review" (p. 11) and was defined in the text as a process that could be used to enhance reading comprehension (*The College Reader*). That morning, Mr. Mercado in his usual monotone voice, said he would be introducing a reading skill called SQ3R. The process called for students to skim a chapter before reading, ask questions before reading, read the passage, take notes or write out questions and then think about what students have read

and written. The chapter devoted 46 pages to this skill and provided several practice exercises for students to apply the reading process. However, when it came time to learn and implement the reading strategy, Mr. Mercado did not elaborate how SQ3R could function to analyze and interpret texts or aid students in their reading comprehension skills.

Mr. Mercado instructed SQ3R as a piecemeal approach, where only certain elements of the process were practiced. To begin his lesson on SQ3R, Mr. Mercado first instructed students to survey the first chapter that defined the reading strategy and presented practice exercises. The chapter, comprised of 46 pages, presented various lengths of reading passages and exercises for students to complete. While looking over the subtitles, pictures and graphs, Mr. Mercado indicated that it was important to survey bolded words and anything that was underlined or italicized. Together, they pointed out titles of several reading passages including biological rhythms, separation of powers, categories of norms, and plant cell walls. They also reviewed a picture of a plant cell by pointing out the walls of the cell, and the different channels between the cell walls. As part of surveying, students also pointed out words such as "taboos", "isotonic" and "isometric", and "bulimia nervosa" which were bolded in the reading excerpts. Both Mr. Mercado and his students spent about 30 minutes during the hour

and fifty minute class on this activity. Towards the end of the chapter, Mr. Mercado then instructed students to “quickly list on a piece of paper the definition of SQ3R” and turn it in to him. This exercise ended his lesson on SQ3R.

The lesson only required students to practice surveying, which was one of five elements of SQ3R. Because of the lack of practice, and the fact that students were not required to apply the remaining elements of the strategy, it was unclear what students had to gain from this lesson. Mr. Mercado could have further probed to show how SQ3R functioned to enhance reading comprehension, but chose not to fully engage students during his lesson. His lesson also did not advance the application of the skill, as students were only required to submit a list of words defining the elements of the reading strategy. Mr. Mercado approached many of his lessons in this way. He would introduce concepts, but not fully elaborate on them. Additionally, he would often remind students of the importance of using reading skills such as SQ3R, but did not require students to apply the skills when reading passages during class time.

5.3.1 Concept Maps

During the third week of class, Mr. Mercado covered several topics such as synonyms, antonyms, general context and word parts that were also lightly discussed and lacked depth. This lack of depth was also evident when one morning he introduced a

topic on concept maps. According to *The College Reader*, concept maps were diagrams that show the flow of ideas from the main idea to the supporting details. Concept maps can assist with connecting ideas to one another and can be useful in visualizing and grasping the author's main points. The text illustrated to students how to develop a concept map, and provided several examples of concepts maps on topics such as the health benefits of fish, the use of trees and using online chat. However, Mr. Mercado did not provide students the opportunity to actually develop their own concept map. His lesson consisted of only reading the definition of concepts maps, looking at the examples and explaining how useful they could be if done properly. However, because students were not required to actually implement or practice the skill, it was unclear whether students grasped the theory behind using concept maps or could apply the strategy independently.

5.3.2 Roots and Prefixes

Another instance of a lesson that lacked depth and demonstrated his sense of urgency was present during a lesson on roots and prefixes. Roots, as described in the text, are the basic or main parts of a word while prefixes are groups of letters used to modify or change the meaning of a word. During the first week of the semester, Mr. Mercado passed out a handout entitled "General Roots and Prefixes." Beginning with the letter

"A" and running through the letter "V" the handout listed over 100 common roots or prefixes. It also provided their meanings and gave examples of words using a root or prefix. For instance, the handout defined the prefix "super" as meaning "above" and listed examples of words such as "superior", "superscript" and "supersede." Mr. Mercado reiterated that the purpose of using roots and prefixes was to assist students in enhancing their vocabulary skills.

Mr. Mercado divided students into five groups and had each group select two words found on the handout to write on the board. Five students, one from each group, wrote the following words on the board:

bioflavonoid	circumflex	epilogue	antediluvian
sacrosanct	perambulate	viaduct	incommunicado
misanthrope	syncretism		

After the students were finished, he then instructed students to use the handout to define the words on the board. However, when it came time to review the words, students were unable to properly pronounce the words, nor correctly define them. Mr. Mercado and his students spent the next 15 minutes of a 30 minute lesson trying to properly pronounce the words on the board. The class sounded out each word with his assistance, and then Mr. Mercado had them repeat the word two to three times.

Once they had run through the list on the board, the class then proceeded to attempt to define the words using the worksheet. However, once again, students were unable to complete this task. For example, with the word "antediluvian", the prefix "ante" was defined on the worksheet as meaning "before." However, the remaining word parts were not found in the handout. Therefore, when Mr. Mercado asked for its definition, students could only recite the definition of "ante." The same held true for the word "syncretism" as students were only able to define "syn" as meaning "together" because that was the only word part on the worksheet.

Recognizing that the students were unable to define the words using his handout, Mr. Mercado began to lecture them stating they needed to read more to improve their vocabulary. He continued that students "need to be familiar with these roots and prefixes so you can understand what you are reading" and "make sure you reference this handout throughout the semester when you get into your college classes." He also urged students to "use this list" and "it is not something you stick in your folder and forget about." Despite these proclamations, students did not reference the handout again, nor was it mentioned or referenced by Mr. Mercado throughout the remainder of the course. Hence, taught in isolation, using the roots and prefixes

worksheet did little to assist students in enhancing their vocabulary skills or comprehension abilities.

5.3.3 *Using a Glossary*

Trying to maintain the pace of instruction, Mr. Mercado also routinely dismissed wrong answers. Attempting to teach students how to use a glossary, Mr. Mercado asked students to read a two paragraph passage on dependence and addiction. The passage provided a glossary which defined the following words: psychoactive drugs, tolerance, physiological dependence, addiction and psychological dependence. Within the passage, the words which were defined in the glossary were also bolded in the reading passage. Students were required to review the glossary, read the passage and complete five fill in the blank exercises using the five bolded words. Following a five minute period of silent reading, Mr. Mercado reviewed the exercises numbered one through five in the text. The following conversation took place:

Mr. Mercado: Ok, quickly, everybody done with the exercise there? Ok, um, continued use of what leads to several serious outcomes?

Student: Psychoactive drug

Mr. Mercado: Which ones?

Student: Psychoactive drug

Mr. Mercado: Good

Mr. Mercado: Psychoactive drugs alter a person's sense of reality, affecting perception, memory, mood and behavior.

Ongoing use of the drugs causes what?

Student: Addiction

Mr. Mercado: Not addiction. Not yet.

Student: Psychosis

Mr. Mercado: No

Student: Dependence

Mr. Mercado: No, tolerance

Mr. Mercado: Ok, quickly, let's keep going. A state in which the body needs more of the drug to produce the same effect. As the body develops tolerance, the body also develops what?

Student: Addiction

Mr. Mercado: Not addiction

Student: Psychological addiction

Mr. Mercado: No, try again

Student: Dependence

Mr. Mercado: No, it's physiological addiction

Mr. Mercado: Ok, now tragically the result of tolerance and dependence is addiction. That's where addiction goes.

Mr. Mercado: In addition, a person can suffer from what?

Student: Physiological dependence

Mr. Mercado: No, psychological dependence

Mr. Mercado: Ok, now do practice six, seven and eight. I don't think you'll have too much trouble with these.

Despite that students routinely provided wrong answers during his review of the reading exercises, Mr. Mercado continued with his lessons and did not delve into their wrong answers. He simply glossed over them and then instructed students to complete the following set of practice exercises in the text. Thus, it is uncertain what students learned from this lesson given that they were unable to demonstrate successful application of the reading skill under discussion.

5.4 Teaching to the Test

As the semester progressed, I wondered what compelled this pace of instruction and prevented Mr. Mercado from going into depth with his lessons. Given the lack of outside reading requirements or without drawing from a variety of reading sources, I asked what the urgency was and began to consider that the exit reading exam was playing a part. It became evident after a few weeks in the class that he was strategically drawing his lessons from the exit exam into the curriculum in use. The reading exit exam encompassed a variety of skills drawn directly from the reading exercises in the assigned text. Thus, Mr. Mercado, knowing students needed to pass the exit exam to pass the course, provided lessons on numerous skills found on the

exam. As a result, lessons emphasized isolated reading skills and averted learning reading.

5.4.1 Reading Exit Exam

The reading exam required students to read an excerpted passage on violence in sports and complete 25 test questions. The exam included multiple choice, matching, fill in the blank and short answer exercises. Some of the reading skills found on the exam included organizational patterns, word parts, summaries, transitions, main ideas, facts and opinions, and context clues. Given that students were required to pass the exit exam in order to pass the class, the enacted curriculum often mirrored the content found in the reading exit exam, which was derived from the course text. In fact, Mr. Mercado relied heavily on the text and the practice exercises to carry out his lessons. Neither the formal nor enacted curriculum prescribed outside reading requirements. Hence, Mr. Mercado's students were not required to complete any outside reading sources to further their literacy skills or apply such reading strategies.

5.4.2 Class Exams

The enacted curriculum of *Advanced College Reading* provided many occasions for students to engage in and practice the types of tasks found on the reading exit exam. In fact, not only did instruction rely heavily on basic practices exercises, class exams were also formatted in the same way. For example, in this

particular lesson, Mr. Mercado passed out an exam entitled "Vocabulary Skills" to his students. The exam had 20 multiple choice questions. The first ten questions asked students to select the definition of synonyms, antonyms, context clues, prefixes and suffixes. An example of a test question was:

Words that have the same or nearly the same meaning are _____

- a) homonyms
- b) pseudonyms
- c) antonyms
- d) synonyms

The last ten questions asked students to select the best definition of the underlined word in each sentence based upon the context clues. Another example of a test question was:

Rampant escalation of violence occurs in countries with little government control over lawlessness in outlying areas.

- a) growing or spreading unchecked
- b) lessening
- c) mandated
- d) acceptable

Mr. Mercado introduced the test by stating:

Ok, you guys have it easy today. I am going to give you a quick pop quiz, and you get to work with your partner. You can use your book, but you cannot use a dictionary. Again,

you can use your book and a friend, not a dictionary. Once you have your answers, you are going to transfer them to the answer sheet, but only use pencil on this one. Ok, anybody need a pencil? On the second part, continue 11 through 20. Also, on your answer sheet under your name, put MWF and 10 to 11:50, so I don't mix it up with my other classes. Again, you can't use a dictionary or your cell phone, only your book and partner.

After explaining the test instructions, students proceeded to work with their partners to complete the exam. After about 25 minutes, Mr. Mercado collected the exams and dismissed the class for the day.

Aiming to prepare students for the exit exam, Mr. Mercado's exams and quizzes mirrored the format of the exit exam. Moreover, because the chapter exams mirrored the course textbook, students were again required to complete elementary reading tasks also as part of their course evaluation. Using short reading passages, typically between one to three paragraphs, the exams required students to recall the acronyms for reading strategies, or define vocabulary words or select the main idea from a short passage. Because Mr. Mercado did not provide any other form of assessments to students, performance on these exams and the exit reading exam were the determining factors in passing the class. Thus, the enacted curriculum

centered on passing the reading exit exam, and passing the exit exam was treated as if this would prepare students for college level reading and transform students into efficient readers of college texts.

5.4.3 Topic Sentences

A lesson on identifying topic sentences illustrated how teaching to the test took precedence over the comprehension of lessons. Students were prompted to read a one paragraph excerpt entitled "Drugs in Our Lives." The excerpt described how drugs can affect the daily lives of people. After reading the paragraph out loud, Mr. Mercado then reviewed the exercises in the text which prompted students to identify the topic of the paragraph and the sentence that stated the author's main idea. The following dialogue ensued:

Mr. Mercado: Ok, let's answer the first question. What is the topic of the paragraph?

Jan: That marijuana can alter your mind.

Mr. Mercado: No. Anyone else?

Mark: Drinking alcohol usually begins in high school.

Mr. Mercado: Wrong.

Josue: School teaches people that doing drugs is bad.

Mr. Mercado: C'mon folks. Remember that the topic reveals the author's opinion about the subject at hand. Try again.

Jan: Newspapers and television always show drugs on them.

Mr. Mercado: Nope, the topic of the paragraph is using drugs on a regular basis can negatively impact the daily life of users.

[....] Ok, which sentence states the author's main idea?

Arturo: Experimenting with drugs can lead to using other drugs.

Mr. Mercado: No, that's not it.

Sara: People use drugs around you, so be careful.

Mr. Mercado: No, the sentence that gives the main idea is drugs affect our daily lives. You need to remember that the topic sentence reveals the author's opinion or approach to the topic. It is usually only one sentence and can be anywhere in the essay. The main idea is the author's controlling point about the topic.

Mr. Mercado: Alright, now quickly work with your partner to complete practice exercises two, three and four in your book and turn them in at the end of class.

Given that students demonstrated a lack of comprehension during the lesson on topic sentences, it is puzzling to see Mr. Mercado no providing additional instructions or clarification for students. For instance, he could have provided further reading material for students to practice identifying topic sentences. Instead, he required students to select the topic and main idea on multiple choice practice exercises referencing jazz, karaoke and ancient civilizations. I later realized that as part of the reading exit exam, students were required to only

complete two multiple choice questions on topic sentences, which mirrored the practice exercises found in the assigned text.

5.4.4 Outlines

Another lesson that further demonstrated that teaching to the test shaped the enacted curriculum was also evident when Mr. Mercado provided a lesson on outlines. Outlines were defined in *The College Reader* as illustrating “the relationships among the main ideas, major supporting details and minor supporting details” (p. 184). Not requiring students to read a passage and then write an outline, he only discussed how they could be effective in understanding the flow of ideas and had students complete a multiple choice exercise on outlines. In their text, students read the differences between a formal, informal and traditional outline and then read a one paragraph excerpt on the relationship between incomes and types of job. Mr. Mercado then had students complete the following multiple choice exercise:

1. What word or phrase signals the second major detail?
 - a. also b. for example c. conversely
2. Sentences 4 and 5 are
 - a. major supporting details b. minor supporting details
3. The outline used in his activity is an example of
 - a. an informal outline b. a formal outline (p. 186)

Because Mr. Mercado did not require students to develop an outline on their own or implement this skill on a reading passage, it was sufficient for students to read about outlines and answer basic questions on them. This was also true on the exit exam. It called for students to read an excerpted passage, and answer questions on major and supporting details, but did not require students to develop an outline as part of the exam criteria.

5.4.5 Maintaining the Pace of Instruction

Attempting to cover all the elements found in the reading exit exam, Mr. Mercado moved briskly over the exercises in the assigned text, regardless of whether students understood the concepts under discussion. Correct answers served as a way to continue with a particular lesson instead of an opening to further ensure comprehension. Wrong answers or confusion about a skill were either dismissed or met with the right answer from the instructor.

An example where students answered the reading exercises correctly, but clearly did not grasp the concept, was evident during a lesson on creating summaries from annotations. Given that students were required to write a brief summary statement as part of the reading exit exam, Mr. Mercado attempted to teach this skill to students. A summary was defined in *The College Reader* as "a brief, clear restatement of the most important

points of a paragraph or passage" (p. 156). Students read a passage titled "Conflict Defined", which was four paragraphs long and described different types of reasons for creating conflict. The passage detailed how conflict is based on interactions and how communication problems may result in conflict. Students were then instructed to complete the following summary statement with information from the passage:

Conflict is the _____ of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. Perceptions based on _____ reactions, nonverbal reactions and differing interpersonal _____ styles are key sources of conflict.

(p. 169)

The focus of the lesson was on completing two summary statements by answering the fill in the blank worksheet using basic information from the reading passage. After about five minutes of silent reading, Mr. Mercado said "ok, quickly, let's review these together, pick someone in your group to be the speaker":

Mr. Mercado: Ok, the answer for number one?

Jan: Interaction

Mr. Mercado: Good. What about number two?

Mark: Verbal

Mr. Mercado: Right, and the final one?

Josue: Communication

Nodding his head, Mr. Mercado then stated "very good, now I want you to read the next passage on addiction, and write a summary statement in your notebooks." The passage on addiction was also two paragraphs. The students took out their spiral notebooks and then began to write after about five minutes of silent reading. However, instead of writing a concise summary statement, I observed students writing paragraphs, some as long as eight sentences. Two students, Jan and Mark even wrote two summary paragraphs instead of a one summary statement. A few minutes later, Mr. Mercado commented "don't forget that you only need to write a one sentence summary folks, I don't want you to regurgitate the whole story." Despite that students had correctly answered the practice exercises, Mr. Mercado dismissed that students were unable to correctly apply the skill on creating summaries.

5.5 Conclusion

A variety of factors contributed to averting the act of reading in Mr. Mercado's reading course. Foremost, the primary instructional approach of Mr. Mercado was isolated reading skills instruction (Beder & Molina, 2001). His lessons focused on conveying a particular skill, and then eliciting recall of such skills from his students. He taught learning reading as reproducing or memorizing information. Given that there were

neither homework assignments, nor outside reading requirements, nor were there any projects required of students, daily lessons consisted of elementary reading exercises. Because the curriculum derived from the assigned text, students were not exposed to full length texts or lengthier developments of complex ideas or arguments. Furthermore, as lessons did not require students to engage in a variety of genres in preparation for college reading, it was unclear how students would be able to manage their reading requirements once they encountered literary material found in college texts.

The overarching emphasis on reviewing reading exercises led to a curriculum that taught basic skills, but also failed to provide sustained opportunities to apply those skills. This was evident in the quick pace of instruction that was embedded in Mr. Mercado's daily lessons. To meet the academic imperatives of the formal curriculum, Mr. Mercado attempted to cover a large range of topics over an eight week time frame. However, this sense of urgency was evident in lessons that lacked depth, glossed over numerous concepts during class time, and averted reading.

The reading exit exam also shaped the enacted curriculum and contributed to the lack of reading. Mr. Mercado's lessons emphasized brief, factual information drawn from paragraphs or short, excerpted passages from the course textbook. The reading

exit exam, also formatted in the same way, determined whether students could progress to their college level courses. Because Mr. Mercado was attempting to prepare students for the exit exam, he enacted a curriculum which mirrored the reading tasks found in the exam. Hence, lessons focused on developing discrete skills through practice on sentences or paragraphs. Thus, Mr. Mercado conducted his lessons as if the purpose of instruction was to help students pass the reading exit exam instead of developing better reading literacy and comprehension skills.

Essentially, the enacted curriculum failed to expose students to the types of reading tasks found in college courses. The course text, which was primarily skills based, was the primary source of instruction, as Mr. Mercado did not assign any outside reading requirements. Reading was taught as if it only involved learning isolated reading skills and revolved around completing multiple choice exercises and exams. The enacted curriculum averted reading by teaching reading in a prescribed, regimented fashion. Hence, I was puzzled at how the literacy abilities students improved and whether the enacted curriculum prepared them to read the complex and varied texts found in college courses. Thus, I continued probing by interviewing students and asking them what they had learned about reading in their college reading course.

CHAPTER SIX: THE EXPERIENCED CURRICULUM

6.1 Introduction

Often omitted from studies of curriculum are the voices of students and their experiences within the classroom setting. In this chapter I aimed to address the experienced curriculum, one of the layers of this multi-layered approach employed in this study of curriculum (Cohen, 1990; Hartell, 2012; Mendez, 2010; Page, 1991; Page, 1999). How a curriculum is experienced is socially constructed and these constructions are based on the day to day interactions between local actors in classrooms (Erickson, 1986; Spindler & Spindler, 1982). Because culture is the meaning people make and remake as they interact with each other and their social environment, I focused on the meaning-perspectives of actors within a classroom setting (Erickson, 1986). In essence, I aimed to illuminate how students experienced curriculum and detail what a developmental reading course afforded them.

This study described a formal curriculum that set forth ambitious reading objectives, but resulted in educational encounters that ultimately averted reading. Classroom activities focused on completing elementary practice exercises derived from the assigned course textbook while classroom discourse centered on recitation, typically in the form of eliciting student responses from teacher's questions. What was revealed from

student interviews was a reading class that neither demanded much effort nor required much reading.

Students also communicated, towards the middle of the semester, that learning reading skills in preparation for the exit exam appeared to be Mr. Mercado's main goal for the class. Reading at the college level was portrayed as practicing skills to pass the exit test. Therefore, because students understood that passing the exam allowed them to continue onto their college level courses, they were complicit in enacting a curriculum that emphasized reading skills rather than on knowledge to enhance their ability to manage and understand college level texts.

Given that I was also interested in the perspectives of all classroom participants, I also interviewed Mr. Mercado. These interviews revealed concerns about teaching all the elements found in the exit exam within an eight week semester. Also revealed was an admission of whether one course was sufficient to transform students from underprepared college readers into proficient readers of college texts.

6.2 Laid Back Class

Revealed in student interviews was a common theme that *Advanced College Reading* was class that did not require much effort or student participation. In fact, the same phrases, "laid back", "easy" and "boring" surfaced again and again as

students described daily lessons. Neither reading outside of class or beyond what was found in the text, nor completing homework assignments were imperative to passing the class. Many of the students reiterated that *Advanced College Reading* did not require much effort or work. For instance, Caro explained,

At first I thought that Mr. Mercado was mean and going to be tough because he was going really fast through the book. But now I think he's nice, and so far the class is easy. It's just simple reading stuff that we review in the book together or with a partner. (Caro, personal communication, October 2011)

Angie also reiterated,

So far, the class is easy. Mr. Mercado is not strict and not too hard. I think I am gonna get an A for my grade cause he doesn't make us do any homework or stuff like that, which is really awesome (Angie, personal communication, October 2011)

6.2.1 *Absence of Homework*

Contributing to students describing *Advanced College Reading* as a laid back class was the absence of homework. The lack of homework was brought up often by students, particularly as they compared *Advanced College Reading* to their other classes. When asked about the homework requirements, most seemed content that they didn't have to worry about completing

work outside of class. In fact, students in *Advanced College Reading* completed all assignments during class and were not required to read chapters ahead of class time or be prepared to discuss the content in chapters. Mando explained,

For my English class, I have a lot of homework. I have to read the assigned chapter before class because the teacher gives us a quiz at the beginning of each class. So, that's kind of hard. In reading class, we do all the stuff during class and so I don't have to worry about reading ahead or anything like that. Mr. Mercado is pretty laid back which is cool (Mando, personal communication, October 2011)

Caro, a dental assisting major, also discussed the absence of homework in *Advanced College Reading*. She explained,

I am also taking a nutrition class and I have to do a lot of stuff at home for the class. The teacher makes us read ahead of time and then we discuss the stuff in the chapter during class. Sometimes, she gives us pop quizzes so we can't like get away with not doing the reading. (Caro, personal communication, November 2011)

The depiction of *Advanced College Reading* as an easy class was also expressed by Raymond. He even compared his high school experience to the class:

In my high school Advanced Placement class, I had to study for the test, do the reading the night before, and be ready with the answer when the teacher asked for it in class. Here, we do everything in class, so it's a little easier. (Raymond, personal communication, November 2011)

6.2.2 Expression of Boredom

Though students did not express disappointment or dissatisfaction regarding the absence of homework, what did surface was expression of boredom and monotony concerning class lessons. Because daily lessons consisted mainly of reviewing practice exercises from the text, activities were routine and at times discouraged active participation from students. During class, I observed students falling asleep or staring out of the classroom window with glazed looks in their eyes. Caro explained,

We kind of do the same thing every day, so it gets kind of boring sometimes. It feels like we keep going over the same things, so it's hard to pay attention all the time (Caro, personal communication, November 2011)

Maria also explained that even though Mr. Mercado was not a hard teacher, she found going to reading class was a challenge. She put it,

I know that class is easy but it's so boring.
Sometimes I just bring in my homework from my other
classes and do it in class. All we do anyways is work
in pairs or with a group, so I can get away with it.
(Maria, personal communication, November 2011)

At times, Mr. Mercado would reprimand students who were not
actively participating during class lessons. For example, he
would tell students who put their head on their desks to "sit
up" or "pay attention." Raymond, whom I observed taking short
naps throughout class lessons, was often scolded by Mr. Mercado.
Raymond explained,

I know I'm not supposed to sleep in class, it's hard
not to. Can't we watch a movie or can't we do
something different? I'm so bored and the teacher's
voice just puts me to sleep. (Raymond, personal
communication, November 2011)

6.2.3 *Emphasis on Group Work*

Group work also contributed to a class that was described
as easy and laid back among students. Group work was very common
during daily classroom activities in *Advanced College Reading*.
In fact, students often consulted each other for help with
worksheets and tests or any other task assigned by Mr. Mercado.
Because group work was permitted during quizzes and exams, it

contributed to students labeling the class as easy. Mando explained,

Mr. Mercado lets us work together when we have to do a test or quiz. So if I can't figure out the answer, then I just ask my partner or group for help. He also lets us use our books too, so that makes it even easier. Open book tests are the best. (Mando, personal communication, November 2011)

However, not all member of a group always worked together to complete their assigned tasks. Thus, group work sometimes served to discourage instead of encourage class participation. Because there seemed to always be at least one or two students per group that actively participated in completing the practices exercises, the remaining group members were able to do minimal work.

Given that the course text was integral in shaping the enacted curriculum, I was at first puzzled at how some students managed to not bring a textbook to class, but still participate. In fact, there were three students, Amy, Chris and Sandra, whom I observed that never had a textbook. Since most of the lessons were derived from the text, I found it perplexing that these students were allowed to continue in the course without any repercussions. However, to compensate for the lack of a text, the same three students always partnered up with a classmate

that had their text. Hence, they were able to complete the in-class assignments in this way. Because students completed all assignments in class, and worked in pairs or small groups, Amy, Chris and Sandra were able to remain in the course, and ultimately pass the exam and class. Angie, also noticing that not all students had their textbooks affirmed,

Even though we use the book a lot, some kids don't even have their book, so we just share. It's not a big deal. In high school, we shared books all the time.

(Angie, personal communication, November 2011)

6.3 Import of Advanced College Reading

Though the students in *Advanced College Reading* recognized that passing the course allowed them to move on towards their college level courses, some students began to question the value of the course in improving their reading abilities. After spending a few weeks in the course several students verbalized that if they had studied for the placement test or completed tutoring, they felt they could have tested out of the class. Angie reiterated,

I should have retaken the placement test, because then I could have started my real college classes. I didn't take the test seriously, so that's why I had to take this class. But now that I'm here, I wished someone

would have told me to retake the test. (Angie, personal communication, November 2011)

Raymond also discussed his concerns over his placement into the course and explained,

When I first tested into the class, I thought that they were gonna make me do a lot of reading, like reading a lot of books and stuff like that. But so far it's just learning like how to define vocabulary words. I already know how to do that. I guess I should have paid more attention to the entrance test so that I could have skipped this class. (Raymond, personal communication, November 2011)

Though students moved along with the pace of instruction, and were generally compliant with Mr. Mercado's instructions, students provided vague answers when we discussed the reading topics reviewed in class. In fact, during our interviews, students had a difficult time articulating what the class was about or what they had learned so far in the course. Four weeks into the *Advanced College Reading*, Caro offered this description of the class,

The reading class has helped me find the main idea, and helped me to read, um, I guess faster. Also, I've learned like simple reading stuff like finding main topic and also like, how to survey a paragraph. I know

how to find bold words, stuff like that. I guess that's about it. (personal communication, November 2011).

Angie also struggled to articulate what the class was about and could only recall a few topics from class lessons, even though we were halfway through the course. During an interview towards the middle of the semester, she stated,

So far, the class is going good. I've learned stuff like, I guess, vocabulary words, and the main idea, and um, the synonyms and how they can help you. Basic reading things that can help me read better. (Angie, personal communication, November 2011)

6.3.1 Reading Demands in College Courses

Student interviews also revealed uncertainty of whether *Advanced College Reading* would benefit them in their college level courses. *Advanced College Reading* acted as a gateway course, meaning students were unable to enroll in courses such as Government or History until they earned a C grade or better in their developmental reading course. However, at times, students were able to get around the requirement by co-enrolling for a reading intensive course and *Advanced College Reading*. One student, named Ben who was a criminal justice major, did just that. While in Mr. Mercado's course, he enrolled for American Government and *Advanced College Reading* within the same

semester. However, he ended up withdrawing from American Government, after spending nine weeks in the course because he had fallen behind on the reading and could not keep up with the course requirements. In an interview with Ben, we discussed how he struggled with his Government course.

I had to drop my Government class because it was way too hard. There was tons of reading and I couldn't keep up. I know I have to retake the course, but I am gonna wait till the very end to take it again. I am scared I won't be able to pass it again or I will have to drop it. (Ben, personal communication, November 2011)

Towards the end of the semester, I met with Ben again to discuss whether *Advanced College Reading* had prepared him to manage the reading tasks required of him in American Government. He explained,

I know I passed my reading course with a good grade, but there's no way that I am gonna register for Government again next semester. I still don't think I will pass it. There's so much homework and reading. The teacher wanted me to read like two or three chapter a week and that's too much. I think I will start with my other basics like math and computers that I think are easier and I will worry about

Government later. (Ben, personal communication, December 2011)

Interviews with Angie and Ramyond also revealed that perhaps the lessons in *Advanced College Reading* were not enough to help prepare them for reading intensive courses. Angie stated,

I keep hearing that once I get into my real college courses that I will have to do a lot of reading and homework. I am still kind of scared even though I know this class is supposed to help me and all. (Angie, personal communication, December 2011)

Raymond also reiterated,

I don't know if I am ready to take my psychology courses because my friends have told me that a lot of reading is assigned in them. (Raymond, personal communication, December 2011)

6.4 Reading Exit Exam

Though students questioned the merit of the course, they also expressed confidence in their preparation for the exit exam. Because *Advanced College Reading* acted as a gateway course, students understood the significance of passing the course to progress towards their degree requirements. Since the reading exit exam was central to passing the course, students did not rebel against the daily lessons that centered on passing

the exam. Instead, they were generally complicit in participating in a curriculum that portrayed reading as learning isolated reading skills.

Mr. Mercado often reiterated the importance of passing the exam during class lessons and during interviews, and students acknowledged that they felt the class was preparing them for this task. Mando explained,

I know that I need to pass the exit exam, and I think I will, because our teacher gives us lots of examples and exercise to practice on. I'm not too worried about it, because we've been going over the stuff the whole semester. (Mando, personal communication, December 2011)

Some students also revealed that they felt "confident" (Ben, personal communication, December 2011) and "prepared" (Angie, personal communication, December 2011) for the exit exam. They also did not reveal much resentment towards Mr. Mercado's emphasis on passing the exit test, even though they were unsure if they could manage college reading requirements. Instead, they articulated a sense of self-assurance that they would easily pass the test because they spent so much time in class preparing for it. Raymond explained,

We go over a lot practice exercises on stuff like main idea, and context clues and topic sentences. But, it's

ok cause Mr. Mercado said that we needed to pass the exit test to pass the class. (Raymond, personal communication, November 2011)

Of the 27 students enrolled in *Advanced College Reading*, 24 students passed the reading exit exam. Hence, they were eligible to progress towards their credit bearing college courses. The three students which were unable to pass the exam were either required to retake *Advanced College Reading* or retake the placement exam.

6.5 Mr. Mercado's Perspectives on Teaching to the Test

Mr. Mercado shared his perspectives about the purpose of *Advanced College Reading* and the goals of the course. He reiterated that his reading course was for students that had tested into the course based on their placement exam. His perspectives also revealed the importance of the exit exam, but also a sense of ambivalence of whether one reading course was sufficient to provide students the necessary skills to meet the reading demands in college. He offered this description of the course,

This course is giving them the skills to help them decipher whatever it is they are supposed to read. It helps with understanding different styles of writing and learning new vocabulary. It also gives them tools and skills to help them can read at a proficient level

by the end of the semester. (Mercado, personal communication, November 2011)

He also explained that critical thinking was a reading skill with which many of his students struggled. Therefore, one of his goals was to provide a large amount of reading practice during his class to improve their critical thinking abilities.

Critical thinking is obviously one of the skills students lack and reading fluidity. I don't know how much these guys have had to read or what they've read in high school, so I approach the reading class like I do with my ESL classes by exposure, like English. The more exposure to English the more language they learn. So exposure, exposure, and read, read, read. The more exposure they have to reading, it's going improve their reading eventually. Again, critical thinking, especially when they get into argumentation. They seem to have a lot of trouble with that and they seem to take everything they read as the God's honest truth. Um, but um, primarily, a lot of them come deficient and so you know its read, read, read and get them to read as much as possible. (Mercado, personal communication, November 2011)

Despite Mr. Mercado's intentions of helping students improve their reading skills, he also expressed some doubt

regarding whether an eight week course could effectively transform students into proficient readers of college texts. He expressed that some students were just too far behind or lacked the study skills to be successful in class, and much less a college level course. He reiterated, that some instructors in the History and Political Science disciplines often complained that either the students were not reading the material or that they could not understand their reading material.

A mini-mester is a lot more challenging and students need to be willing to work. We shouldn't allow students placing in the middle of the placement score cutoff in the mini-mester because it's just so fast and hard for them to keep up. I do think it's realistic for them to get the skills they need in an eight week course versus a sixteen week course but it depends what they bring to the table and their previous ability to read. (Mercado, personal communication, November 2011)

Mr. Mercado also expressed the difficulty in teaching reading skills to students. Mr. Mercado offered this explanation on teaching reading skills compared to teaching math and writing skills,

With reading you have to get an insight into the brain and on what's going on in their mind to improve

their reading. Math you can see and writing you can see it, but with reading it's really hard to determine what the issue is. Also, with a class of 27 students, it's kind of hard to develop an individualized education plan for each student. (Mercado, personal communication, November 2011)

In regards to the amount of reading required in his course, he affirmed that students were required to do lots of reading, especially from the assigned textbook. He explained that *Advanced College Reading* was a rigorous course, given the amount of reading he required from the textbook and the abbreviated semester. Though he stated that most of the reading could be done in class, he explained that the textbook provided lots of college level reading material. Mr. Mercado expressed,

The textbook is full of a lot of reading, um, so I choose the readings I want them to do. However, there is no way I could do the whole book. It's just too big, especially for a mini-mester. But what I do is strategically figure out what in the chapters that they are going to be reading so they can practice certain skills. Also, a lot of the paragraphs in the book are college level, so they have a high level of vocabulary practice and lots of chances to practice

different reading skills. (Mercado, personal communication, November 2011)

Passing the reading exit exam was critical to passing *Advanced College Reading*. Therefore, one of Mr. Mercado's main priorities was to prepare students for the exam. He expressed that passing the exit exam was a good indicator of whether students possessed the reading skills necessary for college level coursework. He reiterated,

Yeah, the exit exam is for the most part multiple choice and short answer. It's pretty good because it does reflect again the skills they are going need. If a student can pass that, at a 70 or better, they have the minimum skills to be successful in a college level credit class. But don't forget, it's a make or break, they flunk that they flunk the course. (Mercado, personal communication, November 2011)

Even though Mr. Mercado expressed confidence that students who passed the exit were prepared for credit bearing courses, towards the end of the 8 week course, he expressed concerns on students' abilities to bridge the gap from developmental reading requirements to college level reading requirements,

Strong reading skills are one of the mainstays or the skills that you absolutely have got to have. Again, my belief is if they weren't reading much before they

came to college it's really hard to get them over that hump once they are in college. I don't think most of them realize how important and how much reading they are going to have to do to be successful in college.

(Mercado, personal communication, December 2011)

6.6 Conclusion

The students in *Advanced College Reading* experienced a curriculum that focused on preparing them for the exit reading exam. Despite that some of the students felt bored or believed the class was too easy, they were complicit in enacting a curriculum that focused on practice exercises derived from the assigned text. Students did not challenge Mr. Mercado on their lack of exposure to college level reading material, nor did they protest over the daily lessons or course requirements. Though Hartell (2012) revealed a sense of hostility among students enrolled in an orientation course, I did not identify much resentment among students in *Advanced College Reading*. Perhaps, it was because they were all freshmen, this being their first semester as college students. However, regardless of their reservations regarding their ability to manage college level reading requirements, they revealed confidence in successfully being able to pass the exit exam and developmental reading class.

It was unclear whether the experienced curriculum provided students with the necessary knowledge to engage and be successful in reading intensive courses such as Government or History. Even Mr. Mercado verbalized some concerns whether an eight week reading course was enough to transform students into efficient readers of college level texts. Ultimately, the lessons in *Advanced College Reading* did not provide many sustained opportunities for underprepared college readers to engage in college level reading material and so whether they became better readers is unknown.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine the curriculum implemented in a developmental reading course in a community college setting. Approaching curriculum as a three layered construct, (Cohen, 1990; Hartell, 2012; Mendez, 2010; Page, 1991; Page, 1999), I document the formal curriculum, the enacted curriculum and the experienced curriculum and describe how classroom lessons in *Advanced College Reading* focused on teaching reading as a set of discrete skills and on preparing students for the reading exit exam. Such lessons lacked depth, averted reading and were of little value to improving the literacy abilities of underprepared college students.

7.2 Curriculum, Context and Classroom Actors

The local interpretation of developmental reading is shaped by the local context and environment. Thus, like Cohen (1990), Hartell (2012), Mendez (2010), Page (1991), and Page (1999), I examined "the immediate and local meanings from the actors' point of view" (Erickson, 1986, p. 119) to garner a better understanding of curriculum as is it interpreted, produced and practiced by students and their teachers. This local interpretation of a reading curriculum showed a disconnection between the formal standards and the enacted and experienced curriculum.

Given that students and teachers translate curriculum in given their classroom environment (Cohen, 1990; Hartell, 2012; Mendez, 2010; Page, 1991; Page, 1999), my study looks at the perspectives of students and teachers as they enact and experience remedial education to better understand the local version of developmental reading that was produced. Looking inside classrooms was central to detailing what developmental reading was at Mountain View Community College. With an interpretive approach, I offered a nuanced account of remedial education with a focus on classroom practice to garner a better understanding of how a developmental reading curriculum is enacted in daily classroom life. Furthermore, as developmental reading was manifested and produced within the instructors' written documents and in the responses to curriculum by students, my analysis found mixed results of a reading course which ultimately afforded little to students that were underprepared in college reading.

7.3 The Formal Curriculum

Advanced College Reading was designed to address the reading deficiencies of students at Mountain View Community College. Though the formal curriculum set forth ambitious learning objectives of helping students develop college level reading skills, such objectives were to be accomplished with the use of only one textbook and demonstrated via a 25 question

reading exit exam. The written documents also portrayed the developmental reading class as a rigorous course aimed at helping students develop their comprehension skills on an analytical and literal level. The numerous course objectives described a class that would transform students into efficient readers of college level texts. The formal curriculum rendered *Advanced College Reading* as a course with a demanding curriculum to help students progress to their credit bearing college courses. However, my analysis shows the complex translations in practice between the formal curriculum and how it is produced in classrooms.

The focus on the procedural aspects of the course, instead of substantive issues related to college literacy was also evident in *Advanced College Reading*. Anyon (1980) in her study of elementary school classrooms also found that teachers in classrooms with low income students tended to emphasize procedural issues that involved rote behavior and memorization, rather than decision making or critical thinking skills. Little meaning was provided behind class assignments and emphasis was on following the rules of the class.

Apple (1983) also lamented the trend towards curriculum that is "conceived outside the schools" and which mandates that teachers implement "someone else's goals and plans and to carry out someone else's suggested activities" (p. 323), with

commercially prepared materials and standardized tests. Such was the case in Mr. Mercado's class on teaching to test, use of only one textbook and emphasis on measurable outcomes, manifested via the use of a multiple choice exit exam.

7.4 The Enacted Curriculum

Mr. Mercado delivered the curriculum based on the written documents because he agreed with the curriculum espoused by the reading discipline. He genuinely believed that *Advanced College Reading* provided students with the critical literacy skills to be successful in college. Thus, he delivered the curriculum in an explicit way endorsed by his department and because it aligned with his curricular vision with teaching reading at the college level.

Mr. Mercado enacted the formal curriculum as adhering to a set of instructional and curricular mandates. Because the formal curriculum upheld the assigned text as the primary source of instruction, classroom lessons centered on learning discrete skills and completing practice exercises from the text. Also playing a part was the reading exit exam. Mr. Mercado facilitated a curriculum that functioned towards teaching reading as reviewing skills found on the exam. Perhaps because it was easier to demonstrate student gains on isolated reading skills or because of the directives from the formal curriculum, the exam played a central role in *Advanced College Reading*.

Thus, his primary goal focused on covering content found in *The College Reader*, and preparing students for the exit exam.

Also revealed in the enacted curriculum was a sense of urgency embedded in daily reading lessons. Because the course occurred over an eight week period, Mr. Mercado attempted to cover a large amount of material within a short amount of time. These time constraints were evident as students moved through the skills in the text at a rapid pace. What resulted were classroom lessons that favored maintaining the pace of instruction over depth. The lack of depth also resulted in classroom tasks that averted reading.

Since Mr. Mercado failed to assign any outside reading material, the enacted curriculum did not expose students to the kinds of materials encountered in college level courses. Instead, students were provided with extensive practice on decontextualized passages and anecdotal selections. Emphasis on instruction was on answering short completion tasks, typically in the form of multiple choice or short answer worksheets and practice exercises. Excerpts were provided for the purpose of delivering specific skills, without the use of authentic college reading material. Therefore, it was difficult to ascertain whether *Advanced College Reading* developed reading skills to help students comprehend an extensive array of academic subjects.

7.5 The Experienced Curriculum

The students in *Advanced College Reading* also chose to facilitate a curriculum that averted reading. They were complicit in enacting a curriculum that depicted reading as learning discrete skills. Though they revealed some reservations regarding the efficacy of the class, they were nevertheless compliant with course requirements and directives. Students helped to enact daily lessons that did not require complex literacy tasks, but instead required them to complete elementary busy work and standardized assessments which mirrored content found on the reading exit exam. Similar to the absence of science in a science class that Page describes (Page, 1999), students themselves also contributed to the absence of reading in their reading class.

There was also an implicit bargain between students and their instructor. According to the students, *Advanced College Reading* was not a demanding course. Because of the lack of assigned homework, many students believed it was an easy, laid back class, requiring little effort. Though students expressed some hesitancy on whether they were prepared to enter their college level courses, they nevertheless were well behaved students. They did not express much hostility or anger towards Mr. Mercado, nor dissatisfaction with the lack of rigor. This also benefitted Mr. Mercado, as he did not have to exert much

effort towards reprimanding or scolding students during class. Hence, lessons ran smoothly without much disruption.

7.6 Literacy at the College Level

Given that students in *Advanced College Reading* were not subject to the complex texts and reading materials typically found in college level courses, it is unclear whether they would be able manage the reading tasks in such courses. The method of instruction and content framed reading as learning specific skills, and not as engaging in multifaceted reading requirements. The lack of authentic literature also revealed lessons that attributed reading as solely concerned with memorizing various reading strategies.

Student success in *Advanced College Reading* was also narrowly defined, in that completion of the reading exit exam allowed students to matriculate into their credit bearing courses. Passing the class assumed that students were literate enough to enroll in such courses and be successful. However, without the instruction and exposure to varied forms of genres, it is unknown whether students would have difficulty managing such reading tasks when they entered their college level courses.

The results of this study also revealed that the lessons in *Advanced College Reading* provided emphasis on instruction that instead of making meaning from college texts, was on extracting

short passages to answer multiple choice questions. Lessons were provided to deliver a specific skill, rather than for enhancing literacy. Yet, research on literacy recognizes that understanding what one has read is more than answering practice exercises; it is about improving comprehension, monitoring understanding, and recognizing the processes underlying a reading strategy (Bosley, 2008; Bullock et al., 2003).

Though much research also recommends teaching struggling readers literacy skills using authentic texts of diverse genres, in this class only a textbook was assigned and used throughout the course (Berardo, 2006; Bosley, 2008; Cox, et al., 2003). Thus, students were not exposed to the types of texts often found in college classrooms, nor were they provided with explicit instruction in applying reading strategies to college level material. Though Mr. Mercado was not restricted to only using one text, he chose to enact a curriculum without employing other literary pieces. The lack of exposure to contextualized literary pieces was also discussed in research about college reading. In fact, academic literacy "is not well taught by practice on discrete skills in a workbook" (Maloney, 2003, p. 665). Instead, students must be taught to use critical inquiry, or active reading strategies to include multiple readings of text, annotating, marking of unfamiliar words, formulating questions and writing summaries. Exposing students to a variety

of texts also allows for engagement of students into the reading and writing process.

Time on task (Maxwell, 1997), which directly links learning to the amount of time students spend engaged in learning, also played a role in *Advanced College Reading*. Given the abbreviated semester, perhaps it was also unrealistic to transform underprepared college students into proficient readers of college texts within an eight week time frame. Many of the students admitted that they were not avid readers, and did not engage in any form of reading outside class requirements. Therefore, they were fully reliant on using *Advanced College Reading* as a means to improve their readings skills. Moreover, strategy instruction takes time and such skills are not quickly mastered (Bullock, et al., 2003). Additionally, "a single developmental course aimed at improving a critically important academic skill like reading comprehension, therefore, may simply be insufficient to remedy most students' skill deficiencies", (Cox, et al.; 2003, p. 174).

Though *Advanced College Reading* seemed to promise academic success in managing college level reading demands, it appears that these promises remained unfulfilled. Though 24 of the 27 students enrolled in the course passed the exit exam, this figure still does not clarify or describe much about their abilities to comprehend college level texts or to what extent

their reading comprehension skills improved. Hence, the exit exam results obscure more than illustrate the extent to which students were fully prepared to continue their educational path at Mountain View Community College.

7.7 Implications

This study detailed a college developmental reading course that was primarily skills based and which ultimately averted the act of teaching and learning reading. Given the data on attrition among students with demonstrated deficiencies in reading, it is troublesome that a course designed to enhance college reading skills was delivered in a way that framed literacy as learning isolated skills. Hence, this study provided a description and analysis on the kinds of skills and knowledge that were taught in a developmental reading class.

The ways in which the curriculum was designed and implemented also highlighted the tension of two equally important missions; providing access to post-secondary education and preparing students who are underprepared for the challenges and rigors of college. This tension was made visible at the institutional level, the classroom level and among students and teachers.

Given that Mountain View Community College is an open admissions institution, any student, regardless of academic preparation, may enroll to pursue a postsecondary education.

Because students found to be underprepared must enroll in developmental education, colleges must attempt to remediate such students to the point that they are college ready in a relatively short amount of time. This mission perhaps led to a curriculum that lacked depth and was of little value to students.

From my analysis, it appears that Mountain View Community College was focused on expediting the process to make students college ready, given the abbreviated semester in which *Advanced College Reading* took place. This sense of urgency may have trickled down to departments charged with providing remedial education to underprepared college students. Consequently, though it may have been unrealistic to catch up students to their college ready peers with an eight week reading class, the imperative to accelerate this process resulted in providing courses that were completed at a face pace. This urgency was manifested in classroom lessons in which professors were pressed for time to teach certain elements of the curriculum. It was also visible among students who were interested in quickly completing their remedial courses and progressing towards the college level coursework.

My observations of the reading course at Mountain View Community College serves as a cautionary tale regarding state pressure to expedite remediation efforts by colleges.

Developmental reading, in this study, provided fragmented skills as a means to remedy academic preparedness, and as a way to solve the dilemma of access to higher education. Yet, despite the availability of remedial courses, the problem of student attrition persists. Thus, educational practitioners can perhaps work towards mitigating students' unpreparedness to improve academic outcomes within all segments of higher education and decrease the need for college remediation.

7.8 Need for Further Research

Through this account, readers can get a sense of what it means to participate in developmental education at Mountain View Community College. This study offers common themes and findings in the results that other readers may find comparable to their own studies of curriculum or teaching practice. However, the mixed value that the developmental reading curriculum afforded students at Mountain View Community College calls for further investigation. Curriculum is complex, and despite remediation's long history in higher education, there are very few studies that detail and describe classroom practice of developmental reading. Given the importance of reading skills to college success, it is critically important to study what remedial reading education affords students. Most important to these studies are the perspectives of those who experience and enact curriculum most directly, students and teachers.

My goal for this research was to educate myself and those interested in developmental reading on how to better serve students found to be underprepared in the area of college reading. Given the increase in numbers of such students, it is imperative to provide educational encounters that enhance students' abilities to be successful in their college level courses. Because I limited my study for one semester, follow through of students for a lengthier time frame could gain greater insight into issues of student retention and attrition among underprepared college readers.

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CURRICULUM VITA

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