TOWARDS A CULTURE OF CARING:

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT INTERACTIONS TO IMPROVE

TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES STUDENTS

IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Dissertation

by

SUZANNE MORALES-VALE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2008

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	M. Carolyn Clark
Committee Members,	Susan Pedersen
	Nancy Simpson
	Christine Stanley
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ABSTRACT

Towards a Culture of Caring: Formative Assessment Interactions

to Improve Teaching and Learning for Developmental Studies Students

in a Community College. (December 2008)

Suzanne Morales-Vale, B.A., Texas State University, San Marcos;

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The purpose of this study was to understand how formative assessment
interactions in developmental education reading, writing, and mathematics
courses at a community college were experienced by both students and faculty
members and how they were perceived to impact learning and teaching. The
specific assessment technique studied involved a series of one-on-one, out-of-
class Feedback Intervention (FI) interactions that focused on discussions
regarding students' strengths and weaknesses in relation to their course learning
outcomes.

In using a case study approach, I interviewed students and faculty
members in focus group and individual settings. Using constant-comparative
qualitative analysis, I examined their perceptions in order to better understand
the impact student-faculty interactions had on students' learning and faculty

members' teaching experiences. Questionnaires were also used to corroborate findings.

The following research questions were used: (1) What are the contexts and learning experiences of developmental studies students? (2) How has formative assessment, specifically out-of-class interactions with their instructors, affected perceptions of their learning experiences? (3) How have these interactions affected developmental studies faculty members' perceptions about their teaching?

When I considered the overall impact of the student-faculty interactions, one overarching theme emerged: the FI interaction did have a positive impact on learning, and to a lesser degree, teaching. This theme was supported through two main findings related to learning: the interaction increased students' motivation to learn and improved their learning strategies. In regards to teaching, the main finding was that facilitation of the FI interaction affected faculty members in that they became more learner-centered in their teaching strategies and methodologies. These findings confirmed a connective, dynamic learning process for both students and faculty members.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

From its inception in the early twentieth century, the community college, an institution at the time unique to the United States, was intended as an opportunity for high school graduates to continue their learning through relatively inexpensive public higher education. The community college has since not only addressed this intention but has grown into an irreplaceable national resource for millions seeking higher education. In *Growth of an American Invention*, community college historian Thomas Diener (1986) begins his book by noting the following: "Perhaps this is the most American feature of this American invention: that the community college is of the people, by the people, and for the people" (p. 17).

Purpose of the Community College

While the precise date of the origin of the first "junior" colleges is unknown, the themes that influenced their emergence came front and center by the late 19th century: the debate over the purpose and scope of secondary education, the formation of the associate degree, and university efforts to differentiate between general and specialized learning (Diener, 1986). Examples of these debates manifested themselves during this time with high schools adding the 13th and 14th grades, technical and vocational schools adding post-secondary instruction, and universities designating the lower-level

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This dissertation follows the style of *Journal of Developmental Education.*

coursework as "junior college" (general education) and upper-level as "senior college" (specialized education) (Diener, 1986, p. 9).

Further difficulties to define the exact history of the junior college come as a result of its many sponsorships and origins of control: the secondary system, the post-secondary system, or the technical/vocational system. However, the one clear founding purpose of the junior college was the transfer function: to enable students to begin the first two years of their collegiate studies at one institution and then transfer to a 4-year university. Because many junior college students intended to transfer, they needed information on how to do this, so the role of guidance counselor emerged.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the US went through a great period of industrial growth, accompanied by a rising movement towards business efficiency, quality, and entrepreneurship, with machines replacing unskilled workers and the need for developing trained accountants, technicians, and clerical personnel. Thus emerged the second purpose for the junior college: a place where adults could be trained for these jobs. Often, local needs were identified through community surveys and community education-work councils, and junior colleges worked closely with their communities to address those needs.

Another important purpose of the community college was the establishment of the Associate's degree, led by William Rainey Harper at the University of Chicago at the turn of the century. Harper strongly supported

lower-division institutions, based on the German system of higher education, because of the important role they played:

> The student who is not really fitted by nature to take the higher work could stop naturally and honorably at the end of the sophomore year. Many students who might not have the courage to enter upon a course of four years' study would be willing to do the two years of work before entering business or the professional school. (as cited in Carnegie, 1970, p. 10)

The Associate's degree was designed to allow students to purposely leave after two years, leaving only the most talented students to continue on to the upper-level courses. One result was that an entire generation of students who would have never considered higher education felt welcomed and accepted. At the same time, universities were free to pursue their "primary functions of advancing knowledge and providing graduate education" (Carnegie, 1970, p. 11).

<center>Impact of Major Historical Events</center>

The early twentieth century in the United States represented the rise in the industrial era, a period where large numbers of skilled workers were needed to fuel the growth of business and industry. However, at the time most students, unable or unwilling to leave home for distant colleges and universities, did not seek higher education. Meanwhile, public high school systems, eager to meet the needs of their communities, were adding teacher training and manual labor (vocational) training to their curricula. Schools in Indiana and Illinois were among the first to experiment with high school/community colleges, combined

institutions that emphasized small classes and faculty-student relationships. These early community colleges included not only academics but also student newspapers, government, drama, and orchestra groups. Where these schools also thrived was in providing higher education opportunities for traditionally underrepresented groups mainly through their teacher education programs (Roueche & Baker, 1987, 3-6). The early focus of community colleges was to meet local needs, and they became especially favorable for women because of the institution's leading role in preparing grammar school teachers.

With the coming of the Depression in the 1930s, junior colleges provided job-training programs to help ease unemployment. Brint & Karabel (1989) call this period the "Great Depression Boom" because the number of junior colleges doubled during the years between 1929 and 1939. The colleges thrived because they were relatively inexpensive to attend and operate during a time when demand for higher education in general increased, caused by a combination of factors including compulsory schooling laws and child labor legislation. Junior college enrollments increased because of the scarcity of jobs for college-age students. For many during this time, the greatest concern was cost; thus, staying home and attending the local junior college was the most feasible option.

The biggest effect on the growth of the junior college during the early and mid 20th century, however, can be attributed to the outcomes of WWII and the GI Bill which provided opportunities like none before for Americans to reach their

post-secondary goals.   The GI Bill of 1944 was intended not only to thank military personnel for their service, but also to use colleges and universities to keep these soldiers out of the labor market until it was ready to absorb them. Massive federal assistance for returning soldiers, for technical education, and for general financial aid all had a great deal of influence of the demand for post-secondary education as well (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Community service also became very important after World War II, as community colleges began to focus on providing technical and job skill learning for adults, not just those straight from high schools. Service also entailed canvassing the community for solutions to community problems, such as job re-training and continuing education for older adults.

Since the 1950s, the explanations for the rapid growth of community colleges can be attributed to three main factors: open admission, statewide geographic distributions, and low tuition policies. In addition, they

> offer more varied programs for a greater variety of students than any other segment of higher education. They provide a chance for many who are not fully committed in advance to a four-year college career to try out higher education without great risks of time or money. They appeal to students who are undecided about their future careers and unprepared to choose a field of specialization. And, last but by no means least, they provide an opportunity for continuing education to working adults seeking to upgrade their skills and training. (Carnegie, 1970, p. 3)

Funding

While funding for junior colleges can be loosely traced to their source and purpose,

the mix of origins of these uniquely American postsecondary institutions has resulted in widely differing patterns of public governance and support. Unlike their four-year counterparts, community colleges essentially have been a product of their local community, reflecting local priorities and resources. As a result, it has been extremely difficult to track and report on how they are funded" (CCCP, 2000).

For example, when junior colleges originated from the local high schools, their funding came from the local tax property tax base. When junior colleges grew out of support for local universities, their funding was tied to that institution's budget. In the Northeast, the first junior colleges were privately funded, as they were closely connected to the prestigious private liberal arts colleges of the regions. Businesses and local chambers of commerce often supported many junior colleges, especially in the West, and in Texas, junior colleges were entirely funded by their tuition charges until after 1930 when the state Board of Education authorized local tax districts, dictated by strict rules and approval of the local tax payers, to help fund them (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

One key factor in consolidating junior colleges into a nationally recognized, unified movement was the establishment in 1921 of the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC). The organization helped not only

centralized their interests and identity but most importantly, provide an organizational center helping to shape their future and purpose. Maintaining local and regional control remained an important tenet of the AAJC; however, this organization was important to helping gain federal funding support as the mission of junior colleges became not only nationally recognized but vital (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

To address the ever-growing call for equality of educational opportunity for all citizens, the Truman Commission of 1948 proposed "providing proper education for all the people of the community without regard to race, sex, religion, color, geographical location, or financial status" (Roueche & Baker, 1987, p. 4). In addition, the commission called for a massive expansion of funding for higher education, creating a national public network of "community" colleges, making it clear that "its central goal of extending educational opportunities could not be achieved without the drastic expansion of the community college" (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 71).

Thus began the decades of explosive growth of community colleges, from 457 in the 1960s to almost 1700 today (Digest of Education Statistics, 2007), where almost half of the undergraduates in the United States are enrolled. Since 1901, nearly 100 million students have attended community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2006a; Roueche & Baker, 1987; Roueche & Snow, 1977).   The initial growth was due to a number of factors, including historical events such as the Cold War and *Sputnik,* which focused on a need for

science education; population factors such as the post-war baby-boom, which simply increased the number of students seeking higher education; and increased external funding, including financial support increases from two national foundations in the thirty-eight years between 1920 and 1958 to eight foundations in the short four years between 1958 and 1962 (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Further growth from 1970 to today can be attributed to additional and more extensive support from state and national foundations; increased support from and collaboration with the business and corporate community; increased vocational enrollments due to the declining labor market for four-year graduates and increased numbers of non-traditional students (older, part-time, disadvantaged, and low-ability); and increased federal higher education support (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Although community college courses are not without tuition and fees, they are provided at a substantial reduction when compared to the traditional four-year institution (NCES, 2006; AACC, 2006b). This can be attributed in part because community colleges, unlike universities, have local tax authority and must gain approval from their constituents for increases in the tax amount, usually based on property tax. However, with the federal government recognizing more and more the value of the community college mission, the Higher Education Act of 1965 earmarked funding specifically for two-year institutions.

<u>Open Access</u>

More than any other post-secondary public institution, community colleges with combined local, state, and federal efforts are able to address the tenets of Thomas Jefferson's belief in free public education to promote a thriving democracy: "Equal opportunity, good citizenship, and economic well-being, all concepts of a free society, depend on a free education for all citizens" (as cited in Roueche & Baker, 1987, p. 3). The community college provides the most affordable route to enable the greater likelihood for students to continue beyond secondary education. Roueche and Baker (1987) summarize the usefulness of this unique and significant institution: "Although no one expects community colleges to solve all of society's ills, these institutions have been, and continue to be, manifestations of the American dream of equal opportunity for all, regardless of religion, ethnic group, or socioeconomic status" (p. 3).

While each community college creates its own mission, providing open access, community-needs training, and low tuition are some characteristics that every college shares. By allowing automatic admission to any student with a high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED), community colleges foster inclusion and equity for all groups, regardless of prior grades or evidence of academic preparation and aptitude.

Open door access to college for all students, including those underprepared to do college-level work, lies at the core of the community college mission. This policy promoted the belief that

The community college, was, in fact, a powerful force for the

democratization of higher education [in that it provided] a coherent vision

of an orderly and integrated system of higher education flexibly feeding

manpower into an advanced, technology-based economy . . . [which

was] but a mirror image of the orderly, stratified, and increasingly

meritocratic occupational structure into which its "products" would be

channeled. (Brint & Karabel, 1989, pp. 104-5)

The main benefits are twofold: the needs of the national workforce are being

met while citizen students are gaining academic, vocational, and technical

knowledge and skills that lead to the possibility of increased wages and the

improvement in quality of life.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2006a)

states, "This mission is driven by a strong commitment to occupational,

remedial, and community, and adult education."   From its inception, the

community college is also strongly known for its student guidance counseling,

and especially transfer functions, with more than 38 percent of all first-time, first-

year students and more than 55 percent of first-time, first-year minority students

choosing two-year institutions as their starting point to higher education (AACC,

2006b).

<div align="center">Developmental Education</div>

Tied closely with its open door policy function, the community college

provides educational opportunities for those who are underprepared. Also

called *compensatory* and *remedial*, what is mostly known today as developmental education became synonymous with community colleges (Diener, 1987). According to community college researchers Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer (1989), "Of all postsecondary educational structures in America, the public community colleges have borne the brunt of the poorly prepared students in the twentieth century" (p. 235).

While open access best addresses opportunities for special populations including the poor, minorities, and adult students, a major consequence of this policy, however, is the need to provide remediation to underprepared students. Roueche and Baker (1987) discuss the dilemma faced by the community college: it must provide open access through the removal of academic, social, and geographical barriers and at the same time adhere to standards of academic quality. Educators have identified over two dozen terms used to describe the student who comes to college with learning issues, among them *disprivileged*, *disadvantaged*, *nontraditional*, *high risk*, and *underprepared* are terms often used (Roueche & Snow, 1977, p. 2).   Whatever term is used for these students, their common bond is a skill deficit in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. Often their study and test-taking skills are also lacking. As community colleges attempt to meet the needs of these students, some critics argue that academic standards are lowered. However, Roueche and Baker (1987) believe the struggle exists not between open access and excellence, but

between open access and the ability to meet the diversity of needs presented by these students.

Enrollments in DE increased greatly in the 1970s because of declining levels in high school academic achievement. In fact, at many community colleges by the late 70s and early 80s, more students were enrolled in basic reading, writing, and mathematics courses than college-level liberal arts courses (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 1989).

Many students who enter community colleges are not prepared for the academic rigor and expectations; thus, remediation through developmental reading, writing, and mathematics courses is an important service offered by these institutions. In fact, 42 percent of freshmen at public 2-year colleges (compared to 12 to 24 percent of freshmen at other types of institutions) enrolled in at least one remedial reading, writing, or mathematics course (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Indeed, community colleges have set the benchmark for providing developmental education.

With all the positive characteristics of community colleges, one point of current contention and increased criticism relating to the area of developmental education is the misunderstanding many have that such programs have been only recently needed. In fact, college professors have been lamenting poor performances in college entrance exams since the 1870s, when over 50 percent of Harvard applicants were admitted "on condition" because students did not meet admission requirements (Casazza & Silverman, 1996, p. 20). Casazza

(1999), in her review of the history of developmental education (DE), notes that this field has been around for centuries, with records dating from the 17th century that document not only underprepared students' acceptance to universities such as Harvard, but also extra assistance provided for those students. As a result of numerous efforts, such as the Morrill Acts of 1862 and National Education Association's Committee of Ten of 1892, secondary and postsecondary institutions began to understand the need for cooperation and collaboration, with most institutions of higher learning offering developmental courses by the turn of the century.

Coupled with the historical events of the early 20th century and the resulting increasing enrollments of non-traditional student, including the increase in the mid-20th century in the part-time student seeking personal enrichment and the decrease in the transfer student, developmental education remains a priority for most community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Developmental education continues to expand as the group of underprepared students grows. In 2005, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board reported that in 2004, 40 percent of all new students were considered underprepared for college, with 50 percent of those students enrolling at community colleges (THECB, 2005). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2006) estimates there are 1.1 million higher education students enrolled in reading and study strategy classes (Angus & Greenbaum, 2003).   While developmental education programs in reading,

writing, and mathematics studies do exist at four-year institutions, the majority of this type of remediation is handled by community colleges because of their mission to ensure access to all.   Today, over 99 percent of community colleges, compared to only 45 percent of four-year institutions, offer developmental courses (AACC, 2006b).

In 1894, 40 percent of college freshmen enrolled in pre-collegiate programs that prepared them for regular college coursework. In Fall 1995, 29 percent of entering freshmen enrolled in at least one remedial course. These statistics show that the debate over the need for, and appropriateness of, developmental education at the postsecondary level has spanned a century. The upcoming Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, through the Spellings commission, has revitalized this ongoing debate.   Legislators, educators, and the general public are asking questions and raising accountability issues. Stakeholders are asking why the public is paying twice for subjects that they believe should have been covered in high school (Wergin, 2005).

While these stakeholders are questioning and demanding answers about the cost and effectiveness of such programs, research consistently suggests that such investments are worthwhile (Ignash, 1997). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note the effectiveness of academic intervention programs in helping students overcome their learning deficits, while also positively affecting academic adjustments and persistence, at least in the short term.   While two- and four-year institutions are offering developmental education in a variety of

ways, ranging from separate programs to integrated supplemental instruction,

research on student retention indicates these programs are making a positive

difference (Tinto, 1993; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Pelligrino, et al., 2001).

<div align="center">Accountability Movement</div>

All institutions of higher education must be accountable for their

performance, but this issue is particularly germane for community colleges

because of their mission to serve all students and because of their local funding.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2006b),

accountability is based on the following principles:

> The community college mission is driven by the needs of its multiple
>
> constituencies to which it is responsive and responsible; community
>
> colleges are expected to accomplish their stated mission; institutional
>
> accountability is measured by the degree to which the college mission is
>
> achieved; community colleges are responsible, in partnership with the
>
> agencies to which they are accountable, for clearly defining those
>
> performance measures related to the mission; community colleges are
>
> responsible for establishing appropriate benchmarks related to
>
> these performance measures in partnership with the same agencies;
>
> the level of achievement on these measures is, to some degree, limited
>
> by available resources and the regulatory environment; and community
>
> colleges are obligated to deploy their resources in an efficient manner.
>
> (p. 9)

The association also believes *ideal* accountability be "A simple set of reliable and valid indicators centered around student goal attainment [that] needs to be adopted nationally if community colleges are to respond more meaningfully to their external constituents" and believes the AACC Core Indicators to be an effective place for community colleges to initiate their accountability plans (p. 8). These core indicators include thirteen points integral to the institutional effectiveness of the college and include the following: (1) student goal attainment; (2) persistence (from one fall semester to the next fall semester); (3) degree completion rates; (4) placement rate in the work force; (5) employer assessment of students; (6) number and rate of transfers; (7) performance after transfer; (8) success in subsequent, related coursework; (9) demonstration of critical literacy skills; (10) demonstration of citizenship skills; (11) client assessment of programs and services; (12) responsiveness to community needs; and (13) participation rate in service area (AACC, 2006b).

The accountability movement has been, and will continue to be, on the forefront in higher education whose institutions must focus more than ever before on improvements in teaching and learning. Thus, as institutions and their leaders embark on various initiatives that seek to address such improvements, they must honestly assess the efficacy and the benefits of these initiatives (*The Chronicle*, 2006). Accountability broadly includes an institution's efforts to respond to internal and external stakeholders' expectations to account for both

contributions by the community (tax monies, grants, etc.) and performance (rates of retention, persistence, graduation, hiring, etc.)

Although numerous improvement initiatives from national accrediting agencies such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on College and North Central Association's Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement have been enacted, nothing illustrates the national spotlight of accountability more directly than Commission on the Future of Higher Education, headed by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. The commission was charged in September 2005 with "creating a 'comprehensive national strategy' for postsecondary education in the U.S., . . . establishing recommendations that cover such topics as the value of higher education, student access to college, cost and affordability, financial aid, and institutional accountability" (*The Chronicle*, 2006, p. B6).

Palomba and Banta (1999) define assessment as the "systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development" (p. 4). Thus, what the institution is accountable for is what is assessed.   Astin (1993a) states that an institution's assessment practices reflect its values (p.3). If so, the institution must value its students and the learning that takes place. The primary mechanism used by institutions to assess student learning is mandated by their national accrediting board. In the case of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, that mechanism

used is the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a course of action for institutional improvement that addresses issues critical to enhancing educational quality and is directly related to student learning (SACS-COC, 2003, p. 5). Each institution must plan, develop, obtain approval, and implement its own QEP, and the data obtained through its initiatives must be at the crux of the institution's decision-making policies and procedures.

When considering assessment on the course level, where student learning outcomes are most directly observed, two approaches are used, depending on their purpose: summative and formative. Summative assessment is used mostly for accountability purposes in that the information allows educators to draw a conclusion and make judgments of students' abilities after the course is completed. The second type, formative assessment, is conducted with the purpose of providing feedback to students while the course is still in progress, enabling them to make adjustments and take actions to improve their performance and possibly make a difference in their course outcome. Both types of assessment are also used on a departmental and institutional level because they provide both aggregate information about overall students' group performance while also allowing faculty members and administrators to make any departmental changes before students complete the course or program, possibly affecting program and departmental outcomes (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

It is clear that educators and other stakeholders are concerned with the state of the effectiveness of teaching and learning at post-secondary institutions. It can be argued whether this concern is a result of increased calls for accountability or the catalyst. Either way, educators have traditionally assessed learning as an end product (i.e., grades and grade point averages). However, they also have found through accountability processes and assessment results that simply giving students a number or letter at the end of a course to represent their "learning" is not effectively communicating specifically what actual changes have, or have not, occurred. In order to increase the effectiveness of the learning process, students must be viewed as active and engaged participants, not passive receptacles of information. Thus, a letter grade at the end of the learning process when it is often considered "too late" has very little impact on motivating students to actively engage in this process.

Studies have confirmed that using formative assessment has a positive effect on learning gains because students have an opportunity not only to make adjustments and changes necessary to improve their weaknesses, but also to gain confidence necessary to build on their strengths. One of most effective forms of formative assessment is feedback provided through one-on-one faculty-student interactions. "Generally, almost any form of student-faculty interaction is positively related to indicators of student success" (Kuh, et al., 2005), and student success is a reflection of productive and positive learning experiences.

Kuh et al. (2005) note that points about assessment, feedback, and faculty-student interactions have been confirmed in numerous studies and through many projects and are considered accepted concepts around which institutions base much of their decision-making regarding allocation of resources and funding. Faculty members use these confirmations to inform their curriculum and methodological decision-making. However, while these studies have sometimes included community college students, they have rarely focused on special populations within the community college.

Most importantly, community college developmental studies students have not been studied to better understand their perceptions of how and why feedback through one-on-one faculty-student interactions has an impact, if at all, on their learning.   Because this group is least prepared for the rigors of college-level coursework and is most likely, statistically, to drop out or not finish, they stand to gain the most through any interventions that may improve their learning. Likewise, community college developmental education faculty members welcome assistance in enhancing their teaching of these students. They are often adjunct and teaching at least five courses per semester. Thus, they are working with limited resources, support, and time. They, like all faculty, seek the most effective ways to increase learning and student success, but they often do not have the support systems such as teaching and learning centers, staffed with multiple personnel, that may be readily available at larger, four-year

institutions.   We need to understand what impact formative assessment interactions have on the perceptions of these instructors and their teaching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how formative assessment interactions in developmental education reading, writing, and mathematics courses at a community college are experienced by both students and faculty members and how they are perceived to impact learning and teaching.

Research Questions

The questions addressed in this study are as follows:

(1)   What are the contexts and learning experiences of developmental studies students?

(2)   How has formative assessment, specifically out-of-class interactions with their instructors, affected perceptions of their learning experiences?

(3)   How have these interactions affected developmental studies faculty members' perceptions about their teaching?

Significance of the Study

Boylan and Saxon (2000), along with others (O'Hear & MacDonald, 1995), have noted a "shortage of quality programmatic research on academic assistance programs and courses" (p. 10).   With developmental education programs providing a primary source of academic assistance to underprepared students, this study would not only help students and faculty members better

understand their learning and teaching roles and processes but more importantly, provide new, essential understanding of the process of feedback intervention interactions and their influence on student learning.   Finally, the findings may also help guide those with decision-making roles to allocate and channel funding to the most effective initiatives for formative assessment.

Definitions

Assessment—The systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 4)

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)—A course of action for institutional improvement that addresses issues critical to enhancing educational quality and directly related to student learning (SACS-COC, 2003, p. 5)

Developmental Education—A field of study that focuses on effective and innovative teaching strategies for remediation of basic (pre-college) level reading, writing, and mathematics skills for underprepared adult populations, with special consideration for diverse learning styles. When the courses offered in this field are not integrated into their respective disciplines, an autonomous Developmental Studies department takes the role of developing, planning, and implementing courses in this field.

Formative assessment—Feedback provided to learners while the course is still in progress about particular qualities of their work that includes guidance on

what they can do to improve, with the main focus on mastery of learning goals

(Pelligrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001, p. 234-5)

Feedback Intervention—a specific type of formative assessment where the

frequent and prompt constructive out-of-class interaction is facilitated by the

instructor with the expressed intent to enhance student mastery of course

outcomes.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

This study sought participants and data from one community college in

the south central region of the United States. This college differs from most

community colleges through its relationship with military education and its

numerous sites around the world. Furthermore, because the feedback

intervention being studied is administered for the first time in Spring 2005, this

study includes data from a pilot program at the institution.   In addition, my role

as QEP Co-Chair included frequent interactions with all constituencies of

campus, including faculty members, and may limit the constructive feedback

sought in this study.   Although I have not been serving in the co-chair role for

several years, I am still currently involved as departmental QEP Co-Specialist

within my department.

<div align="center">Assumptions</div>

As primary researcher, I assumed the participants would be able to

articulate their experiences, perceptions, and reflections to me so that I could

make meaning of them in my interpretation.   I also had to consider my role as

faculty member of the community college where I conducted the research. As in all qualitative research, I understood that my relationship to the participants, especially the faculty members, may have affected their responses. On the other hand, participants were informed of my role in this study; thus, my insider positionality may have also allowed the participants to feel more open and free to delve more deeply into their reflections and experiences than had the participants been approached by a complete stranger. In my "coming clean," so termed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), I had to consider how all the combined parts of myself that made me unique affect what I sought to better understand through my relationship with the participants and their responses.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is informed primarily by two areas of literature in higher education: developmental education (DE) and assessment of student learning.

Developmental Education

The National Association of Developmental Educators (NADE, 1996) defines developmental education (DE) as the following:

> A field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical
>
> foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes
>
> the cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all
>
> levels of the learning continuum . . . . and is sensitive and responsive to
>
> the individual differences and special needs among learners. (p. 1)

The critical element in this otherwise broad definition is the focus on "special needs among learners."   While this definition encompasses all postsecondary students, the underprepared community college student would be clearly also included in this group.

History

Developmental education can be traced back to the early 1900s when more than half of students admitted to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia did not meet entrance requirements (Wyatt, 1992). The result was that developmental courses in reading and study skills were offered to address the needs of these students. By 1909, over 350 colleges, finding themselves in

similar predicaments, began offering similar courses. In 1929, a national survey of state universities reported almost 25 percent followed suit, with many institutions such as Ohio State University making remedial classes in reading and "how to study" mandatory for those students not meeting entrance requirements or scoring low in their high school class rankings (Casazza & Silverman, 1996).

Black colleges were especially vigilant in providing remedial courses for their students who often received inadequate preparation in their elementary and secondary schooling. In an effort to equalize educational opportunities, support was garnered from foundations, state and federal governments, and individuals, with special emphasis on superior practices that provide the most benefits for these students. These programs were mandatory, carried credit, and became the model for subsequent nationwide programs of the 1960s and 1970s, as post-WWII baby boomers helped fuel the explosive growth of community colleges and the need for such programs.

Developmental education programs continued to grow in the mid-20th century, with institutions devoting full-time, specially trained staff from a variety of departments, including English, education, and psychology. Enrollments were affected according to the course title, as reflected in the stigma associated with names such as "Remedial Reading" versus "The Reading Class," with enrollment in the latter course far exceeding the former. According to Wyatt

(1992), such classes attracted hundreds of freshmen, upperclassmen, graduate students, and even law school professors.

The accepted continued growth of such programs in the 1970s reflected the philosophy at the time, eloquently phrased by prominent community college researcher E. Gleazer (1970):

> Meet the student where he [or she] is. I am increasingly impatient with people who ask whether a student is "college material." We are not building a college with the students. The question we ought to ask is whether the college is of sufficient student material. It is the student that we are building, and it is the function of the college to facilitate that process. (p. 50)

With the "open door" concept gaining wide acceptance, albeit with continued controversy, the most important issue facing most institutions beyond the 1970s was keeping its "implied promise" of not only providing access but assuring success. Changing attitudes about higher education in general also contributed: schools should learn as much about the needs of their communities, they must meet the students where they are, and they must provide help to students in identifying their talents and clarfiying their goals (Casazza & Silverman, 1996).

Institutions were having to address the needs of the non-traditional students coming into their doors. They were ranked in the lower third of their class; they were passive in their learning; they often brought a fear of failure;

they were first-generation college students; they were much more diverse in

socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; and they were women and

older students. In addition, many students were underprepared because they

had not expected to enter college or came to college after a number of years out

of school. Finally, a gradual shift in the 1980s in the terminology of learning

assistance programs, from remedial to compensatory to developmental (the

term most often used today) also reflected the shift from a deficiency perspective

to one of assistance, where a more postive tone is established through the

assumption that all students have talents and strengths in some areas (Clowes,

1992).

According to Casazza and Silverman (1989), "Learning assistance, now

increasingly from a developmental point of view, seems to have earned a

permanent spot in higher education" (p. 32).   Statistics about the effectiveness

of such programs help ensure its longevity: persistence toward graduation and

success in more advanced coursework increases. Also taking into consideration

the increasing diverse needs of students and the democratic philosophy

emphazing accessibility while maintaining standards, developmental education

programs clearly play an important role in meeting society's needs.

<div align="center">Theoretical Influences</div>

Based on the NADE definition of DE, this field is about much more than

simply providing remediation or refresher courses and is thus influenced by both

adult development and adult education theory.

Adult Development

  Higbee, Arendale, and Lundell (2005) note that DE, as it is practiced today, has been influenced since the 1960s by the works of Arthur Chickering, William Perry, and Alexander Astin. Chickering's (1969) work, *Education and Identity,* focuses on the importance of helping students develop their potential and making a societal contribution by correlating students' academic development with their personal development.   He identified seven "vectors of development" that describe the dynamics of each vector and considerations leading to and following from it. Development comes from differentiating and integrating students' ever-increasing complexity of ideas, values, and other people as students struggle to integrate their own ideas with the new ones encountered in the educational process.

  In their subsequent work, Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised and reordered those vectors, with applications for a wider variety of college ages. While movement from "lower" to "higher" enables development of skills, confidence, complexity, and awareness, there is no preferable movement through the described vectors and retracing and repeating movement may be common. The seven vectors include 1) achieving competence in intellectual, physical, and manual skills; interpersonal relationships; increased aesthetic and cultural sophistication; 2) managing emotions through control of impulses, developing appropriate responses, and balancing assertiveness and participation; 3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence through

increased "emotional freedom" that focuses on equality and reciprocity involving community and society; 4) developing mature interpersonal relationships through peer interactions that increase awareness and openness to different ideas, backgrounds, and values; 5) establishing identity through development of sense of self in various social, historical, and cultural contexts; 6) developing purpose through "increasing intentionality" that encompass vocational, interpersonal, and family interests in decision-making; and 7) developing integrity through consideration of rules in a relative manner based on their intended purpose while including consideration of others, manifested through "socially responsible behavior." Chickering and Reisser consider the vectors as "major highways for journeying toward individualization—the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being—and also toward communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national and global society" (1993, p. 34).

Perry's (1970) groundbreaking work, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Develoment in the College Years: A Scheme*, argues that moving student thinking from dualistic to autonomous was key to students' growth and development. Through a series a interviews with students at Harvard College, he developed conceptual maps whose structures described the "nature and origins of knowledge, of value, and of responsibility." His model proposed a developmental logical order, from lower to higher, as the increasingly complex experience requires "differentiations and reorganizations" (pp. 1-3). Broadly

defined, his nine-position model can be divided into two sections: a dualistic

perception of right or wrong, good or bad; and multiple points of view including

the vagueness of "Truth," happening at the pivotal Position 5.   As students

structure and restructure their committed beliefs, they may alter their thinking

based on new contexts, evidence, and understanding about themselves and the

world. Perry suggested these changing beliefs occur throughout their lifetime.

In later research, Perry (1981) focused more on the transitioning between

the positions, calling the movement "development" that both includes and goes

beyond the earlier positions. In considering how to characterize the positions

and their development, Perry noted that while we are often faced with similar

issues, each time they are addressed through a distinct perspective that has

changed from the previous setting through development.

Finally, Astin's (1985, 1993a) work focuses on the the role of higher

education in the facilitation of student improvements in personal development

through nurturing students' individual talents. Astin summarizes his theory:

"Students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133).   Combining learning theory

concepts that reinforce the importance of time students spend on skill

development and theories about investment of "psychological energy," his

theory, the input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model, proposes five basic

points: 1) involvement of energy, both psychological and physical, in "objects"

(tasks, people, activities) is required; 2) involvement, while continuous, is

invested differently by each person, depending on the object; 3) involvement can

be measured by quality and quantity; 4) the quality and quantity of involvement is directly proportional to learning; 5) the amount of student involvement defines the effectiveness of the educational policy or practice (Astin, 1993a).

Pascarella and Terrrenzini (2005) call Astin's work, "the middle ground between psychological and sociological explanations of student change" in that the involvement of the environment of the institution is important because it provides mulitple possibilities for engagement with ideas, people, and experiences (p. 53). Also important to note is that these experiences are dependent upon the student's active commitment to taking advantage of these experiences. Thus, simply having institutions offering the opportunties is not enough; students must intentionally and actively become involved in those opportunities to allow for meaningful change to occur.

According to Higbee, et. al. (2005), these theorists "place the student's reflective processes at the core of the learning experience and ask the student to evaluate both new information and the frames of reference through which the information acquires meaning" (p. 7). Furthermore, Arendale (1997) points out that the1990s brought a paradigm shift in higher education from the focus on teaching to learning. With this shift, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA, 2004) notes that students became the center of attention: what do they know, who are they, what are their values and patterns of behavior, and how do they see themselves as contributing to and participating in the world in which they live.

Adult Education

The average age at community colleges is twenty-nine (AACC, 2008); thus, it is important for educators to understand that there are differences between students freshly out of high school and those who are older. Kasworm (2003b) defines the adult student as

> one who represents the *status of age* (typically defined as twenty-five years of age or older; the *status of maturity and developmental complexity* acquired through life responsibilities, perspectives, and financial independence; and the *status of responsible and often-competing sets of adult roles* reflecting work, family, community, and college student commitments. (p. 3, italics in original)

Kasworm (2003b) notes that adult learner participation in college continues to increase yearly and attributes this to the changing beliefs by both adults and society about the importance of a college education that contributes to "work stability, financial support, and related life opportunities," along with the commitment by higher education to "open access and egalitarian outreach to all populations" (p. 4).

While Kasworm acknowledges the College Board's (2001) findings that adult higher education participation is mostly due to career-related reasons, research findings from Kasworm & Marienau (1997) suggest that adult learners fall into three main categories that influence their educational motives and goals: personal transition and changes, fostered by new perspectives and

understanding that often result from key life events; proactive life planning, including those who purposefully and proactively pursue new opportunities for life improvements; and mixed motivators, including some combination of the previous two themes.

Furthermore, when considering how adult learners differ from young adult learners (those age eighteen to twenty-four) in their educational decision-making, Kasworm (2003b) notes that the location, cost, scheduling, support, and even prestige and specialized course offering are all reasons why adult learners select one institution over another. In addition, adult learners are more likely than their younger counterparts to attend part-time (69 percent versus 27 percent), mostly due to other priorities, such as family commitments and full-time employment, that younger adults may not yet be faced with.   Finally, adults bring "more complex and varied backgrounds of life experiences and prior knowledge and skills; complex educational histories; wide-ranging maturity levels, motivations, and attitudes; and limited time, resources, and access for collegiate engagement" (Kasworm, 2003a, p. 81).

In regards to assessment of adult learners, Kasworm & Marienau (1997) note that many traditional assessment programs and processes typically focus on younger adults and assume "linear, continuous participation oriented to a residential academic learning community" (p. 6). However, community colleges are the first choice for a majority of adult learners and may therefore be more

likely to be guided by assessment practices that address adult populations and include the following five principles:

> 1) learning is derived from multiple sources; 2) learning engages the whole person and contributes to that person's development; 3) learning and the capacity for self-direction are promoted by feedback; 4) learning occurs in context; its significance relates in part to its impact on those contexts; and 5) learning from experiences is a unique meaning-making event that creates diversity among adult learners. (Kasworm & Marienau, 1997, p. 7)

While this study's design did not focus specifically on the participants' ages, it is important to note that the average age of students at Central Texas College is in alignment with the national average (CTC, 2007) and therefore considerations must be made that include those of the adult learning population. The FI interaction on which this study is focused centers around those assessment principles outlined above, especially in its goal of fostering self-direction and motivation for developmental studies learners.

<div align="center">Practice</div>

While Developmental Education has clearly been influenced by the works of Chickering, Perry, and Astin, how it is practiced today is greatly dependent upon the groups it intends to serve and those providing the support and opportunities, including students and faculty members. Gaining an understanding of "who" is important to understanding "why" and "how."

<u>Students</u>

DE students have historically been characterized as having significant skill deficiencies that are determined through various means like placement testing, national test scores such as SAT or ACT, and/or past performance; not understanding study skills procedures; and race, culture, and class placing them at a disadvantage when competing with others seeking limited college spaces. While such characterization is somewhat limited, most DE programs still use this to differentiate DE students from the mainstream population (Roueche & Snow, 1977).

When comparing historic and recent population groups in DE programs, the perception may be that minority students, who are statistically more likely to come from urban school systems plagued by low test scores and underfunded programs, dominate DE programs. However, in the 1970s, "the overwhelming majority of low achievers who gained admission to colleges through open-door admissions policies [were] not ethnic minorities; rather, they [were] the white children of blue-collar workers" (Roueche & Snow, 1977, p. 2-3). However, when considering more recent percentages within each population group, Roach (2000) concluded that almost three-fourths of all African-American first-year and two-thirds of all Hispanic first-year students needed developmental mathematics courses and over 60 percent of both required developmental English. According to Roueche and Baker (1987), the difference may be attributed to the

fact that more minority students are entering college today than did thirty years ago.

In addition, other researchers have noted the correlation between poverty and underpreparedness (Lavin & Hyllegard,1996; McCabe, 2000). "The relatively high poverty rate maintained in America perpetuates itself as the most common barrier to education attainment" (Saxon & Boylan, 2001, p. 1). Thus, while vast numbers of students qualifying for DE continue to seek higher education, the majority, unable to gain admission to four-year institutions, begin their journey at the community college.

Yet, in trying to characterize the "typical" DE student, Boylan, Bliss, and Bonham (1997) state:

There is really no such thing . . . . They range in age from 16 to 55. Some are financially disadvantaged and some are quite wealthy. Most are white but a large percentage are African-American or Latino. Some are married and some are single. Most have low high school grades and SAT scores and some are well above average in both categories. In fact, it is the very diversity of [developmental] students that is, perhaps, most interesting. (p. 3)

Kozeracki's (2005) qualitative study of DE faculty members provides yet another view of DE students, this from the faculty perspective. She notes their observations:

Here's the one thing that stands out: the bleak economic realities of their

[students'] lives deeply affect their ability to profit from their classes. Most

of them are working full-time, forty and up hours a week. . . . Most

students work, especially at the [lowest] level. They work because it's an

economic necessity. . . . Also, if they've come out of the public school

system here in this country, they're used to having books provided for

them. Suddenly, they have to lay out possibly over $50 for one class.

And it's a big issue, getting everyone to get a book before it becomes too

hopelessly late for them. . . . Even the most motivated students can be

derailed by the need to work long hours outside the classroom. . . .

Serious family and health problems also seem to be common among

these students, and can interfere with their ability to attend class and

study (p. 41).

Thus, many faculty members are aware of the sometimes overwhelming

struggles faced by DE students, often because of the students' connection to

low socio-economic status.

<u>Faculty</u>

When describing the faculty at public community colleges, researchers

note the percentage of full-time faculty teaching college-credit courses, 66

percent, as slightly higher than those full-time faculty teaching developmental

courses, 56 percent. While a majority of faculty members teaching remedial

courses simultaneously teach college-credit courses as well, only 20 percent are

required to have specific training in developmental education (Phillippe & Patton, 1999). Kozeracki's (2005) study confirms this finding when she notes that formal training for DE faculty members on how to deal with the special needs of DE students is lacking. Basic teaching strategies are rarely addressed in graduate school, and professional associations still seem to be the most productive in providing such preparation and training. This seems to be another area in which improvements can directly affect the quality of DE teaching and learning.

Policies, Practices, and Trends

Most students in developmental education courses were placed in these courses based on assessment results, usually in the form of an institutional placement exam. However, while most community colleges had in place a variety of exemption policies, especially for students with prior college coursework, military service, or high entrance exam scores, 75 percent of institutions based developmental course placement on mandatory assessment testing (Shults, 2002). Roueche and Roueche (1999) note that remedial courses are offered mostly by discipline (66 percent) rather than through a separate department (25 percent). Furthermore, Boylan (1999) notes a number of other academic support services connected with DE programs: tutoring, individualized instruction in learning labs, and counseling and academic advising.

The value of DE becomes clear when measured against college completion rates; that is, students who complete DE courses are better prepared to successfully complete college-level courses (Arendale, 1997). Using this measure of success, Boylan and Saxon (2000) report that 77.2 percent of math, 91.2 percent of English, and 83 percent of reading students pass remedial and subsequent first-try college-level courses. Additionally, Kulik, Kulik, and Shwalb (1983) report that GPAs "were higher for students from the special remedial or developmental programs than similar students who did not participate" in developmental programs (p. 7). Furthermore, community college researcher Hunter Boylan (1999) reports that community college students who have been through assistance programs such as DE are slightly more successful when compared with students "fully prepared" for higher education (p. 17).

<u>Funding</u>

As the needs of developmental education and its ensuing programs continue to grow, funding of such ventures is an important issue, and state and federal legislatures vie to assume or abrogate responsibility. One example of governmental assumption of responsibility is from Texas, where the Higher Education Coordinating Board, through its initiative "Closing the Gaps," has set goals for the state to enroll almost 1.2 million students (THECB, 2004). However, according to organizations such as the Texas Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (2007) and Texas Community College Teachers

Association (2005), the state funding to meet this goal has not been on par with what the Board has set forth as its goals to increase enrollments.

Today's students are also increasingly more diverse culturally and ethnically, come from homes where English is not the primary language, and come with more diagnosed learning disabilities than ever before (Casazza, 1999). Yet, in this biennium, because almost 19 percent of the total community college budget is spent on remediation and DE, legislators in Texas also fight to abrogate responsibility, debating the degree to which developmental education programs in reading, writing, and mathematics should be funded by the state, especially since many argue that, by virtue of public schools already being funded, the state has already met its mandate of paying for pre-college level education (Saxon & Boylan, 2001).

In addition, further pressure comes from accrediting agencies across the country, who are themselves being scrutinized by statewide parental and governmental groups and joining the push to seek data affirming that specially funded developmental studies programs are providing constituencies their "money's worth." Furthermore, community colleges are faced with a unique challenge because of their greater reliance on government funding and their lack of federal research grant monies or alumni fund raising when compared with universities. Since nationally almost half (45 percent) of the total number of undergraduate students attend community colleges, the enormity and importance of the problem is a pressing issue nationally (Boggs, 2004).

Assessment

When considering assessment, educators must first decide exactly what it is that is being assessed. These answers are guided by institutional effectiveness, accountability, and assessment processes as described by the institution's mission, goals, objectives, and strategic plans, along with its Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs). The data obtained from these processes include items like retention and completion rates, and student learning outcome improvements.

At the core of assessment lies the institution's attitude about the importance of its assessment process and how the process results are used to improve its own teaching and learning practices. Hutchings and Marchase (1990) offer the following questions to guide the institution through its own meaning of assesment:

> What should college graduates know, be able to do, and value? Have the graduates of our institutions acquired this learning? What, in fact, are the contributions of the institution and its programs to student growth? How can student learning be improved? (p. 38)

They suggest that these key questions be used when those involved in assessment become confused or side-tracked with regard to its purpose.

External assessment of the effectiveness of institutions of higher education and the learning that takes place falls on regional accrediting agencies such as Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and is

measured through its ten-year peer review (re)affirmation process, such as the one described in the SACS publication, *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement.* The agencies' tradition of peer review can be described as follows: "The best way to assure academic quality is for an institution to be evaluated by faculty and staff drawn from similar institutions according to a set of comprehensive standards negotiated and agreed to by all" (Wergin, 2005). However, according to work funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, this peer review process, under pressure of greater demands for access and from record-level costs, is under scrutiny.   According to Wergin (2005),

> Institutions have not internalized the importance of assessing
> student learning outcomes; widespread discomfort exists about the
> nature and role of "professional judgment" in accreditation teams and, in
> particular, the extent to which it should complement or even override
> specific evaluation criteria; assessment of institutional "quality
> processes" is difficult, both conceptually and operationally; accreditation
> is not sufficiently faculty-centered and there are few rewards for faculty
> engagement; [and] conversation about outcomes has becomes
> politicized, with insitutions backing away from tough questions about
> student learning . . . . (p. 32)

Whether considering assessment externally or internally, Wiggins (1998) notes, "the aim of assessment is primarily to *educate and improve* student performance, not merely to *audit* it" (p. 7, italics in original). He cautions that

institutions must be careful not to misunderstand the purpose of assessment by sacrificing important information about what we value and important feedback about how to teach and learn for the sake of accuracy and efficiency often associated with simple, multiple-choice testing. He insists that institutions strive to understand this basic premise: assessment should not be separate from, but be considered part of learning and thus should be embedded within the learning process, not be done in isolation, quickly and expediently, outside of the learning process.

<div align="center">Classroom Assessment</div>

Assessment on the institutional level is often associated with Institutional Effectiveness or institutional planning, which is concerned with assessment of institution-wide factors including the General Education program, campus-wide assessment activities including QEP initiatives and strategic planning goals, and unit (department) plans that include data such as grade distributions, pass rates, and withdrawal rates, among others (Palomba & Banta, 1999). These data are extracted at the end point of the activity.

Many researchers approach assessment in terms of its purpose. Assessment initiatives that focus on improvements, "meant to 'form' the program or performance," are often considered *formative* while those that focus on demonstration of accountability, "meant to make judgments about the program or performance" can be considered *summative* (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Assessment can also be simply viewed in terms of when it occurs, be it

formative, administered while the course is still in progress for the purpose of effecting further improvement, or summative, occurring at the end of the course for the purpose of evaluating improvements (Crooks, 2001). While recognizing the importance and role of summative data, assessment in the classroom should be dependent upon formative data (Astin, 1993b; Sadler, 1998; Yorke, 2001).

Formative assessment involves feedback and is also often linked with evaluation in that it provides information about students' performance, comparing against a standard (criterion) or against the students themselves (normative). Typical definitions of instructional feedback are as follows:

- "any process that provides information about the thinking, achievement or progress of students" (Crooks, 2001)

- "the knowledge of one's performance provided by an external agent" (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996)

- "information about progress toward a goal the student is trying to achieve" (Brannstorm, 2003)

- "a modification of systematic instruction to allow students to learn extra behaviors . . . important to their development" (Werts, 2003)

- "Actions taken by (an) external agent(s) to provide information regarding some aspect of one's performance" (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996)

Indeed, the entire notion of accountability requires that educators demonstrate through assessment that they are providing a quality education and learning opportunities for their students. In order to demonstrate the

effectiveness of these educational opportunities, educators are now developing assessment initiatives within their institutions that not only summatively track the current progress of their students' learning, but more importantly, formatively explore how to continue to improve student learning. One such initiative is the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), mandated in 2003 as part of member institutions' reaffirmation of accreditation process by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools--Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC). Such initiatives call on institutions to access their strengths and weaknesses in terms of meeting their mission and goals, especially in the areas of innovation and betterment of teaching and learning (SACS, 2003).

As part of their assessment process, many institutions are focusing on those students often termed "at risk" or "remedial," as these underprepared students more likely than traditional students to have been ignored or simply pushed through the K-12 educational system. In recent years, educators shifted from concentrating on student "deficits" to student "talent development"; this change is reflected in the terminology change from "remedial" to the more descriptive term "developmental" (Astin, 1985). However, the stigma can remain with this special group of students, despite any changes in terminology.

Feedback Intervention (FI) Interactions

The assessment process informs decisions about what types of interventions are appropriate in higher education settings. Ratcliff (1997) describes assessment in the larger sense being considered in a three-pronged

manner: measurement, which involves gathering and quantifying information; assessment, which involves analyzing and interpreting information; and evaluation, which involves applying judgments to assessment efforts. Feedback Intervention (FI) is an important link in the assessment and evaluation components of formative assessment because it focuses on specific language that allows instructors and their students to analyze and interpret their course performance outcomes, with the results used to guide the effectiveness for those students of learning techniques.

Feedback intervention (FI) literature dates back almost 100 years and originates mostly from the field of psychology because FI involves human actions, cause-effect behaviorist theory, and other theories such as goal setting theory and control theory. In setting parameters to understand what is meant by FI, I follow the guidelines set by Kluger and DeNisi (1996): while knowledge of performance results (explicit description of one's action) is included, FI is much broader in scope because it goes further to also include an assessment of what can change and improve that action. FI also includes assessment for a wide variety of cognitive and physical tasks often asked of students in an educational setting.

A metanalysis conducted by Kluger and DeNisi (1996) confirms that feedback intervention (FI) can have a positive effect on performance. The authors attribute the basis for this conclusion on Thorndike's law of effect, which equates positive FI with reinforcement and negative FI with punishment. They

argue that both reinforcement and punishment facilitate learning and hence performance (as cited in Kluger & DeNisi, 1996, p. 258). The authors also discuss other theories they believe have substantial relevance to FI: control theory, goal setting theory, social cognition theory, and a variant of learner helplessness theory. Feedback intervention theory (FIT) takes a "hybrid" approach that contains components of the above existing theories while further explaining additional attributes of FI that explains both processes and important factors of behavioral change. If a goal for a learner is important enough but thinks there is "significant discrepancy" between the goal and her current status, change will occur in learners if they believe that discrepancy can be reduced; conversely, if the learner's perceived discrepancy is smaller than her current status, the learner will not change. Motivation for the learner to change can result from the psychologically uncomfortable feeling caused by the difference between desired goal status and perceived goal status, with self-persuasion being more effective and persistent than coercive approaches to change (p. 263-5).

Additionally, Allen et al. (2003) found that students believed their assessment feedback positively affected their perceptions about themselves, their self-confidence, and self-understanding, thus improving their learning experiences. Black and Wiliam (1998), in a ten-year review of 578 publications on assessment research, discuss the influence of assessment in feedback, especially through the social context of learning. They state, "We know of no

other way of raising standards for which such a prima facie case can be made" (p. 38). And, John Hattie, Dean of Education at the University of Auckland, argues that "the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement is feedback" (as cited in Crooks, 2001). However, in order for feedback to be effective, it must be delivered in an effective manner. For example, feedback must be timely (Edgington, 2004; LeClercq, 1999). In addition, the quality of feedback is important: grades and marks are found to not be as effective as tailored comments (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

In his research on the Learning Paradigm College, Tagg (2003) provides a framework for feedback and how it is not only important but "essential" to learning. He describes feedback through a series of metaphors: "feedback as road signs" where learners begin with expert guidance (a map) but look for feedback (signs) to inform them on their progress. While this is a common metaphor used by educators to describe feedback, Tagg points out its problematic static nature: "the signs just sit there while the traveler moves past them and they do not change when they are seen or missed" (p. 191). A better conceptualization, according to Tagg, is "feedback as conversation" where the signs are interactive, involving "probing and experimentation" between the performer and observer. Tagg further points out that if the purpose of assessment is not simply to measure performance, then the student cannot be treated as an a static object and simply the recipient of the observer's

monologue. Feedback must include a dialogue in which it is both given and received and thus be interactive.

Furthermore, the faculty-student interaction through which the feedback is delivered can also have an effect on learning outcomes. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the most comprehensive study to focus on faculty interaction and student learning, conducted by Kuh and Hu (2001), involved nearly 55,000 full-time enrolled university undergraduates. The study differentiated among three types of interaction: *substantive interaction*, that involving academic discussions; *out-of-class contact*, that involving social or personal discussions; and *writing improvement*, that involving critical or advisory discussion specifically related to writing. Their findings confirm that only *substantive interaction* provided significant and positive self-reported gains in learning. Although these findings help inform this study, they also confirm the need to focus more closely on community college students, as the study did not directly address this population.

When studies do address assessment with this special population, little is mentioned regarding student-teacher interactions and the effectiveness of specific teaching and learning techniques. For example, in one study conducted by Dembo and Seli (2004), researchers, focusing on support service interactions, indicated that students' lack of benefit from such interactions can be attributed to issues related to students' resistance to change.   Other studies focus on teaching practices within the classroom (Murray 1991; Bain, 2004).

Additional studies focus on interactions pertaining to the logistics of a course, including whether or not students received written course objectives (Roueche & Snow, 1977). Still other areas of research in this field focus on effectiveness on the program level (Roueche & Baker, 1987; Casazza & Silverman, 1996) while others explore overall student success in terms of retention and persistence (Tinto, 1993).

More closely connected to questions of interactions and learning, research studies such as those conducted by Boylan (1999) explore the effectiveness of Supplemental Instruction (SI) (peer-led, out-of-class tutorial sessions) for developmental education students. While some programs in these studies involve separation of developmental studies students from the regular population, others focus on inclusion and mainstreaming (Tinto, 1993). Still others are studying the impact of computer-aided instruction and learning communities for non-traditional students (Treisman, 1992).

In addition, numerous studies have verified the value of faculty-student interactions, some focusing on specific types of feedback (Edgington, 2004; LeClercq, 1999; Bain, 2004; Revale, 2000), effects on persistence (Tinto, 1993; Lundquist, et.al, 2003), informal interactions and gender (Jaasma & Koper, 2002), the connection to learning and students of color (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004), and out-of-class interactions and increased learning (Terenzini & Wright, 1987; Astin, 1993a).

For example, in Bain's (2004) study on effective college teachers, he noted that when students are given feedback based on predetermined standards and simultaneously led to believe that the faculty member believed the student could meet those standards, positive gains in learning improvements resulted. In addition, Huba and Freed (2000) emphasize that quality feedback from faculty includes not only test scores and grades, which are used mostly to monitor learning, but more importantly, specific feedback about learning outcomes, which actually promotes learning. They state,

> To promote learning, assessments must incorporate genuine feedback that learners can employ in redirecting their efforts. In other words, assessment information must *reveal* to learners an understanding of how their work compares to a standard, the consequences of remaining at their current level of skill or knowledge, as well as information about how to improve, if improvement is needed. (p. 154, italics in original)

A recent important study by Kuh, et al. (2005) identified and documented what strong-performing colleges and universities do to promote student success, defined as higher-than-predicted graduation rates and better-than-predicted student engagement scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). These institutions took part in the DEEP (Document Effective Educational Practice) project from the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University. Their findings noted that feedback was often a "centerpiece" at these institutions and was essential to improving academic performance

through connections with students and faculty. How feedback is used at these institutions can be summarized as such:

> Feedback is timely and frequent, and emphasizes progress rather than mastery and grades; both strong and weak performances receive feedback about areas of strength and areas for improvement; it is intended to motivate students to do their best and not just meet minimum levels of mastery; the extent of feedback and quality of interaction . . . exemplified the value placed on one-on-one work with students to help improve their academic work. (pp. 84-6)

Based on their findings, the authors' recommendations fostering the conditions that matter in terms of student success include "substantive, educationally meaningful student-faculty interaction [that] just doesn't happen; it is expected, nurtured, and supported" (p. 280).

Tinto's (1993) research on student attrition noted three important findings as related to interaction: first, contact with faculty outside the class is associated with heightened intellectual development; second, students are more likely to increase their learning effort when they are more involved in the campus community; and third, greater interaction and engagement increase students' acquisition of knowledge and skills.   These findings apply to university students, but Tinto notes similar findings for community college students as well, even more so for students who are "marginal with regard to college completion" (p. 79).   In addition, Astin's (1993b) comprehensive longitudinal study investigated

twenty-two outcomes affected by eighty-eight environmental variables, and concluded that two variables carry the largest weights and affect the greatest number of outcomes: student-student interaction and student-faculty interaction. However, while these findings focus on interaction and persistence, no connection is made between interactions and increased learning for the community college DE student.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the first and most robust college impact model is Astin's (1993) input-environment-output model, which included a "theory of development" to explain how students change: "Students learn by becoming involved" (p. 53). Building on this theme is The Learning Outcomes model developed by Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, and Nora (1995), which shows the connection between student learning and interactions among peers and with faculty. While this model illustrates a positive correlation between out-of-classroom experiences and improved learning outcomes, it does not differentiate between the general college student and the underprepared student.

Finally, in a review of the results of the most recent study of the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE), which asked over 240,000 four-year students about their higher education learning experiences, the following findings are reported:

Students who participate in collaborative learning and educational activities outside the classroom and who interact more with faculty

members get better grades, are more satisfied with their education, and

are more likely to remain in college. But the gains from those practices

are even greater for students from underrepresented racial and ethnic

backgrounds, or who come to college less prepared than their peers

(Wasley, 2006, A39).

While these findings are important, they focus only on students at four-year

institutions.

The companion survey to the NSSE, The Community College Survey of

Student Engagement (CSSE), which included 92,000 students, finds that

community college students struggle to engage in meaningful ways.

Interestingly, however, remedial students reported more engagement when

compared to academically prepared students (26 versus 19 percent) (Evelyn,

2004).

More recent findings from the CSSE note that 67 percent of remedial

students report that although academic advising was deemed important to them,

26 percent rarely or never participated in such interactions. Furthermore,

according to the faculty version of the student engagement survey, 40 percent of

part-time faculty (versus 10 percent of full-time faculty) report never

academically advising students (Ashburn, 2006). These data are important

when considering that nation-wide, part-time faculty facilitate almost 60 percent

of the teaching at community colleges. Thus, it can be suggested that many

students probably do not receive any academic advising or participate in such

interactions, even though community college students report that faculty members are their preferred source for such advising (Ashburn, 2006).

Thus, whether it is termed *feedback*, *formative assessment*, *instructional feedback,* or *academic advising*, it is clear that such interventions are a key component to improving the quality of the learning experience for the student, especially with consideration that the most effective feedback is about the qualities of the student's work, and not comparisons with other students; specific ways in which the student's work could be improved, and not issues about the student's personality; and improvements that the student has made compared to his or her earlier work (Crooks, 2001, p. 5). Finally, student engagement through feedback is important; however, as noted by Cohen and Brawer (2003), because most community college students are also commuters, they tend to be less engaged with college life than those students attending four-year institutions, presenting an additional dilemma for those seeking to improve learning experiences through increased interaction.

Faculty-Student Interactions. The nature of faculty-student interactions is important to consider because such interactions are influenced by their acknowledged impact on students' overall education to include not only academic feedback but also ability to problem-solve and set life goals (cf. Pascarella, 1980; Chickering, 1969). Other factors influenced by these interactions include occupational decisions, increasing educational aspirations, increased college satisfaction, and intellectual and academic development.

Studies by Tinto (1975) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) focused on educational outcomes that included freshman year grade point average and freshman year intellectual development, both of which were positively influenced by such interactions.

Other studies that focused on intellectual outcomes and included examination of specific aspects of the student-faculty interaction include those by Snow (1973) and Endo and Harpel (1982). Rather than just considering the frequency of interactions, Endo and Harpel further categorized them by "formal," and "informal," the former described as interactions limited to traditional academic and vocational topics while the latter described as "interaction where faculty members have a more friendly relationship with students and exhibit a personal and broad concern with students' emotional and cognitive growth" (p. 119).

These type of interactions are similar to that of Snow's (1973) "high contact faculty," comparable to "informal" in that faculty members spend more time with student's growth-related topics and class material while "low contact faculty" spent less time on class-related materials while keeping a strictly professional approach with students. Finding from both studies concluded that helpfulness of faculty, rather than frequency of interactions, had a greater impact on satisfaction with education and affirmed the importance of such interactions on intellectual outcomes.

Many studies focus on informal faculty-student interaction. Astin (1993b) posited that such out-of-class experiences stimulate both cognitive and emotional growth; and Iverson, Pascarella, and Terenzini (1994) confirm that commuter students' interactions were less frequent and of a more of a formal nature than residential students. Hopkins and Robinson (1993) categorized faculty-student relationships as "friends," "helpers," and "teachers" and found that those students who considered their instructors as "friends" made the greatest overall progress and showed a stronger commitment to coursework studies; Bean and Kuh (1984) reported that student who had a greater number faculty-student contacts exerted more effort and used educational resources to a greater extent. Halawah's (2006) study confirmed findings that social interaction variables, including faculty-student interactions, can predict intellectual development.

Summary

While the field of Developmental Education has been influenced by many important theories of student development, it has also evolved, along with higher education in general, into meeting the ever-growing needs of an increasingly diverse group of students. In fact, the students of today are better defined by their differences than their similarities. Educators must consider not only the "traditional" factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic background, they must also regard culture; multiple student-support factors including transportation, financial aid, and childcare; and level of preparedness, both in

basic disciplines and language. The shift of higher education from a philosophy

of providing access to promoting success makes it impossible for educators not

to focus on the often intangible aspects of the educational experience that

include levels of involvement and engagement with the institution, its people

(faculty, staff, administrators), and course material. Developmental education

plays a crucial role in addressing the students' demand for not only assess but

success.

 While all these factors clearly are important, it is equally essential to

consider the political environment in which these contexts are placed. For

example, while assessment has always taken place in the classroom, the

accountability movement has driven the move to making assessment not just

something educators say they do, but to prove they do it, with funding being the

main catalyst. The sustained focus on data-driven decision-making processes

on the institutional, departmental, and course level drives the need for

administrators and faculty members to prove the value-addedness of their efforts

and activities. Increased efforts related to effectiveness and strategic planning

on the institutional level must go hand-in-hand with related efforts on the course

level: are students learning what they need to know? How can we prove this?

 In answering these questions, faculty members consider the importance

of feedback in student learning. As previously noted, studies confirm that

intentionally planned, quality feedback interactions, in written and verbal forms,

in one-on-one and community settings, can play an important role in not only

intellectual development and learning, but self-efficacy, persistence, and eventual success.

Developmental Education faculty members, while always having understood the crucial role feedback plays in the student's learning process, are looking for ways to go beyond just "knowing"; they are looking for more formalized, data-driven "proof" that feedback, through faculty-student interactions, affects students' learning. The first step in this complex process is understanding their students' perceptions about their educational experiences, especially in terms of feedback interventions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how formative assessment interactions in developmental education reading, writing, and mathematics courses at a community college are experienced by both students and faculty members and how they are perceived to impact learning and teaching. The main question I will use to guide this study is as follows: how is formative assessment, specifically feedback intervention interactions, perceived to improve learning for developmental studies students and the teaching to which they are exposed. When seeking a means to an understanding of this question, I am guided by Peshkin's (1993) considerations about qualitative research:

> To qualitative researchers, what is to be learned does not invariably necessitate a particular study design involving theory, hypothesis, or generalization, though it may. It necessitates a judgment that leads them to decide what research designs they should frame to produce one or more of the many imagined and as yet unimagined outcomes . . . .
>
> (p. 23)

Peshkin uses categories, not for catagorization per se, but as a means to show examples of the type of "good results" which are the "fruits of qualitative research" (p. 28). When considering the categories of description, interpretation, verification, and evaluation, I am reminded that qualitative research does not require a specific intended outcome at the onset of the study;

rather, it allows for multiple ways to understand the outcomes as they emerge through the reseacher's analysis. These multiple views allow for the "broader framework" in which the outcomes can be understood as "good," that is, what Merriam (2002) calls "rigorous, systematic, and ethical, such that results can be trusted" (p. 24).

Pascarella and Terezini (2005) make the following observation:

Although quantitative approaches provide a powerful set of tools for estimating the impact of college on students, these tools are probably most useful in painting the broad outlines of the portrait. Rendering tone, tint, texture and nuance may require the finer brushstrokes characteristic of qualitative approaches (p. 637).

Young and Ley (2002) note that qualitative research is particularly useful in educational settings because of the "complex environment, rich with a variety of interactions to support learning, . . .and is used to identify the values, expectation, and behaviors that occur" (p. 3).   Higbee, et. al. (2005) note the following:

The value of qualitative research in the field of developmental education is its contribution of important knowledge to complex issues of access and retention . . . [through] interviews and focus groups [that] provide information about students' perceptions of their educational experiences [and] cannot be captured or defined through traditional quantitative

measures. . . . bringing a more nuanced view of the complexity of

students' lived experiences and complement the more generalizable

data . . . (p. 12)

In addition, Hewitt-Taylor (2001) discusses the purpose of qualitative

research as focusing not on quantifying facts but rather "identifying the

meanings and values attributed by individuals in real-life situations, with

idiosyncratic and personal views forming part of the overall picture" (42).

Thus, because I am seeking to understand perceptions of students and

faculty members within an educational setting, a qualitative design is the most

effective way to approach my question. By employing qualitative interpretative

strategies, specifically the constant-comparative method, I hope to discover

commonalities in students' and faculty members' experience with feedback

intervention interactions and their effects on teaching and learning.

<div align="center">Case Study</div>

Case study design is a thorough description and analysis is of a *single*

unit or *bounded system* (Smith, 1978, as cited in Merriam, 1998) and is used to

gain "in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (p.

19). The boundedness, or finite nature, of the phenomenon being studied is

essential to be considered a "case," and its researcher must be concerned with

"insight, discovery, and interpretation" as opposed to testing hypotheses.

Merriam further describes additional characteristics of case study:

particularistic, focusing on a specific situation, event, program, or phenomenon;

descriptive, including a "thick" description that is holistic; and heuristic, enabling discovery of new understanding. She also describes what is distinctive about case study knowledge:

> It is more concrete because it resides within our own experience; it is more contextual because it is grounded in context; it is more developed by reader interpretation because readers bring their own experience and understanding, leading to generalizations when new data are added to old data; and it is based more on reference population determined by the reader because the reader particiates in extending generalization to this population. (p. 52)

Merriam also states case study is useful if the researcher is interested in process; that is, meaning is found in causal explanation by confirming the end effect through the intervention or process. Thus, this research study is a case study because I seek to understand the perceptions of a specific phenomenon (faculty-student feedback intervention) in a bounded setting (developmental studies courses at Central Texas College) with a specific group (developmental studies students) in a finite timeframe (one semester).

<u>The Case: Central Texas College</u>

Central Texas College (CTC) is one community college that is assessing the quality of learning for its students, including those in developmental courses, through its reaffirmation of accreditation processes under the auspices of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-Commission on Colleges (SACS-

COC).   According to CTC's college catalog, in 1965 construction for CTC began on 560 acres of land donated by Fort Hood through the Department of Education and local bond funds. CTC started offering courses in 1968 with an initial enrollment of 2,068 students from the western section of Bell and surrounding counties and began offering on-site programs at Fort Hood in 1970 and Europe in 1974.   Spurred by the success of these programs, CTC began its explosive growth beyond Texas and overseas, seeking to serve military communities outside of Texas.   CTC continued its growth through military contracts, and in 1998, CTC faculty members taught their first online courses. Today, CTC provides online and other distance education opportunities to over 30,000 students worldwide.

CTC is located near Fort Hood, one of the largest military bases in the world, and enjoys a special relationship with its neighbor by providing online, distance, and traditional educational opportunities for the military at over 150 sites throughout the United States, Europe, the Pacific Far East, Navy bases, and the Middle East. CTC also contracts with the military, providing counseling and vocational-technical training for military personnel and their dependents.

A brief profile of CTC students includes 26 percent full-time and 30 percent part-time employed. When comparing CTC students to national statistics of community college students, they are employed at about the same rate full-time but 12 percent less part-time. Those CTC students reporting they don't work outside the home but cared for the home and family are 18 percent,

compared to only 8 percent nationally. When comparing full-time versus part-time student status, CTC's students report 27 percent full-time and 73 percent part-time, with 60 percent full-time and 40 percent part-time representing the national average (CTC Fast Facts, 2005; AACC, 2006b). Thus, more CTC students don't work outside the home but are still not enrolling on a full-time status. This may be because of the military connection and resulting extra roles and responsibilities taken on when spouses are deployed overseas. While the role of absent parent is not an "official" job, it is difficult and time-consuming nonetheless.

At Central Texas College (CTC), all students are required to either take an institutional placement exam (with reading, writing, and mathematics sections) or provide national or state test scores such as the ASSET or THEA. Exemptions follow the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) guidelines: active duty/retired military; adequate high school exit test scores, including TAKS and TAAS; and students with three or more college credit hours prior to 1989 (*CTC Catalog*, 2006, p. 18). This is important to note because approximately 70 percent of CTC's students have a millitary affiliation and may be exempt from testing that is intended to place students in the appropriate course level.

Because students come to the community college with various levels of preparation, half of community colleges provide developmental coursework at more than one level: three levels of math (basic math, pre-Algebra, Algebra),

two levels of reading (vocabulary acquisition and reading college-level texts),

two levels of writing (sentence to paragraph and paragraph to essay)(Boylan,

1999). Such courses at CTC are delivered through its Developmental Studies

department which houses reading, writing, and mathematics divisions.

SACS-COC revamped its guidelines in 2001 to include a requirement for

institutions to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a course of action

with its main focus as "the improvement of the quality of student learning"

(SACS, p. 19).   CTC responded to this by focusing on formative assessment

techniques, ones used throughout its various courses, in the instructional

programs.   Although summative assessment, gathered only at the end of a

course, historically has been the crux of program and course evaluation and

review, formative assessment, led by researchers Thomas Angelo and K.

Patricia Cross (1993), has gained momentum in recent years as an especially

effective approach for improving engagement and active learning in classrooms

of higher education, two areas noted to increase success for college students

(Tinto, 1993; CCSSE, 2005)

In Spring 2002, I was asked by CTC's chancellor to co-chair our

institution's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP Leadership Team,

consisting of the upper administrative leadership of CTC, including the

chancellor, deputy chancellors, and deans, was the central planning group for

our QEP project. Its purpose was to offer ideas, coordinate with and check

progress of the various aspects of the QEP. Meanwhile, my colleague Jan

Anderson and I organized the QEP Core Committee, consisting of academic and non-academic leaders such as department chairs, student services personnel, and other campus directors. The main purpose of the Core Committee was to provide input and feedback for various mandated components generated by the co-chairs and Leadership Team while ensuring involvement and buy-in for both the plan itself and the process.

The initial step of the Leadership Team was to brainstorm ideas for what would be our institution's focus. We knew this focus had to center around "improvement of student learning," but we also understood that, with our unique global structure, we had to be broad enough to encompass our worldwide sites while being specific enough to meet our students' needs. After much deliberation, the Team agreed on "Creating a culture that focuses on enhancing student learning" as its guiding focus. We believed this theme included the broadness we sought while narrowing sufficiently what the focus would be: enhancement of student learning.

Once this theme was created, we co-chairs began to hold bi-monthly, two-hour meetings with the Core Committee; its main purpose was to put the theme into practice. Because each CTC worldwide site is different, we decided a combination of central guidance with individual (site) control would be most workable for what we intended to accomplish. The most arduous task for this committee was working through the *QEP Guidebook* (SACS-COC, 2003) to

ensure we understood the intentions of SACS-COC while addressing all aspects of its mandates.

As QEP co-chairs, our tasks included setting the agenda for our meetings, assigning tasks, and compiling the committee's work into a coherent, workable plan. It also included organizing and guiding the various sub-groups within the plan to ensure compliance of what we understood to be another important aspect of the QEP: total institutional involvement. We held conference calls with our deans and site directors worldwide to elicit their input and most importantly, their buy-in into this ongoing, continuous improvement process that would guide our planning and decision-making from then on. In addition, as change agents, we believed stakeholder buy-in would be fostered through participation and training of all campus constituencies, from groundskeepers to the Board of Trustees. We wrote the 65-page QEP document in the summer of 2005.

This three-year project culminated in the SACS-COC visit whereby we presented our plan and justified our decisions and processes while simultaneously actually implementing the plan at our Central Campus and Fort Hood locations. With only three recommendations from the SACS-COC visiting committee, our QEP passed in August 2005. Overseeing this process enabled me not only to understand the complete workings of our complex institution, but most importantly, to get to know and engage our most valuable asset: our people, including students, faculty, staff, and administration worldwide.

As part of the QEP process, faculty members in the Developmental Studies Department were especially interested in focusing on effective approaches to classroom teaching and learning strategies and methods. A number faculty members regularly attend the annual National Organization of Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) convention in Austin, Texas, and were aware of the findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE--developed and sponsored by NISOD), especially in the area of faculty-student interactions. Meanwhile, the results of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory conducted at CTC worldwide locations pointed to an interesting finding: while students rated feedback as "very important" to learning, they ranked their quantity of feedback as "low." This was in contrast to the faculty version of the survey which ranked quantity of feedback at "high" or "very high." The gap between faculty and student perceptions was an indicator that feedback would be an important topic of consideration for our faculty.

After numerous faculty discussions and further considerations of the findings from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE--the related survey of the NSSE), along with the literature on student feedback, the faculty devised a specific formative assessment technique called "feedback intervention" to address the needs of the developmental studies student population at CTC. Faculty members viewed this instructional feedback intervention (FI) as having the potential to positively affect not only the quality of student learning but also teaching effectiveness. Faculty members chose five

students in each of their classes for this intervention, focusing on those who were not doing well in the course, indicated by factors such as pre-test scores, exams, quizzes, attendance, and attitude. This intervention consisted of two faculty-student conferences or "interactions," each approximately ten to fifteen minutes in length, held outside of the regularly-scheduled class time, in which faculty members discuss with students their strengths and weaknesses in relation to stated learning outcomes published in the course syllabus.

The definition of feedback adopted by CTC and used for this study was initially devised through collaborations among CTC's Mental Health Department faculty members and is as follows: "the frequent and prompt constructive interaction facilitated by the instructor with the expressed intent to enhance student mastery of course outcomes."

In addition, rather than simply leaving the discussion at that point, faculty members ask the student to commit to an action that addresses the discussed weakness. Examples include tutoring, workshops, and online supplemental exercises (with immediate feedback).   During the second conference, the faculty member engages the student in discussing the student's progress, with special attention to the student's prior commitment to action.

The additional dimension is intended so that the interactions go beyond simply the faculty member's assessment of the student's strengths and weaknesses. This dimension, the interaction, occurs when the student is invited to commit to an out-of-class meeting or session in order to facilitate

improvement in the observed weakness and thus, the student's learning experience. It is hoped that FI further facilitates the learning process by guiding students to actions that are data-based and more likely to motivate them because of a feeling of ownership through active participation in the formative assessment process.

<u>Participants</u>

The twenty-six student participants in this study were either currently enrolled in or had just completed a reading, writing, or mathematics course in the developmental studies program in the 2006-2007 academic year. Faculty members included those who were or had just completed teaching a course in the developmental studies program in the same academic year.   As incentive for students to participate, it was intitally thought to offer one-hour computer lab course credit that could be applied towards their sixteen-hour (reading and writing) or twelve-hour (mathematics) computer lab course requirement. However, when discussing this with faculty members, they felt the lab time was important to their students' progress. Thus, I offered them a nominal gift card for their participation.

In the spring of 2005, CTC had just completed a three-year reaffirmation of accreditation process through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC); its students, faculty, and staff were fully aware of the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and improvement of student learning efforts through campus-wide workshops and

training, so I had reason to believe that this study was viewed favorably and that students and faculty would be willing to participate.

Data Collection

Data were collected through questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. First, during departmental meetings, faculty members were asked informally about their progress and their reactions to the FI. The responses served to inform the questions asked during the faculty and student focus group interviews. I conducted four student focus group interviews, with five students in each group. Participants for these interviews were solitcited through an invitation to all faculty members to provide a list of the students with whom they had interacted through the FI. Upon receipt of this list, I contacted all potential participants through a combination of emails and face-to-face contacts where I described the research and invited them to participate. Participants were asked about their learning experiences in general and specifically about their experience with the FI interaction with their instructors. Interview schedules are found in Appendix A.

With the faculty focus groups, I conducted one focus group interview with five faculty members. The student interviews were scheduled to take place over a two-week period at the end of the fall semester. After the first interview took place, I sent out reminders to the second group; however, only one student of the seven confirmations came at the appointed time. Rather than canceling the interview, I asked the student if she still wanted to continue, but in an individual

setting as opposed to the group setting. She was happy to continue, noting she had planned to stay at least two hours regardless of the setting. This happened again in the third scheduled student interview, this time with only two students showing up. Again, the students were happy to participate.   All interviews took an average one-and-a-half hours and were held in a CTC classroom. In addition, a certified court reporter recorded and later transcribed the first round of interviews.

Because these interviews were scheduled at the end of the semester near the Chistmas break, I suspect that the no-shows may have been due to students' feelings of burn-out or overwork with end-of-course projects and papers. Also, most community college students have other important priorities that may have taken precedence over a commitment which involved no grades.

The second round of student interviews took place three months later in the middle of the spring semester and included two individual interviews and two student focus group interviews. These were recorded using a digital recorder and were transcribed by a professional company, eScription.com, with confidentiality guaranteed. Using a court reporter for the round one interviews enabled me to fully concentrate on the participants, their responses, and follow-up questions, without having to worry about the logistics of the recording process. In addition, I was also be able to take observational notes on ideas and responses as they naturally occured during the interview. However, although I personnally was responsible for the second-round recording process,

the advanced technology of current digital recording systems enabled me to participate almost as fully as in the first-round.

Because I was concerned about the number of students not showing up to the scheduled interviews while still considering time restraints, I sought another method of learning about developmental students' experiences with the FI intervention. After consulting with faculty colleagues, I chose to use questionnaires because, while easy to administer, they would provide another opportunity for students to give feedback about their experiences. Thus, I developed a questionnaire that was adminstered in the spring semester after Spring Break to all developmental studies students. The questionnaire asked some general demographic questions but mostly included specific open-ended questions about their FI experience. In developing the questions, I had the added advantage of having read through the the data from the first round of student and faculty focus groups. Thus, I was able to use my preliminary impressions from that data set as a guideline for the questionnaire.

In seeking participants for the questionnaire, I asked all students in developmental studies to complete the questionnaire for two reasons: I was having difficulties with students committing to the focus group interviews but not showing up at the designated time, and I was looking for broader participation than I had garnered in the focus group interviews. Using CTC's Webadvisor program, I was able to get an accurate count of students still enrolled in all developmental courses at midterm. Using these numbers, I put together

individual faculty packets which included instructions, a purpose statement, the invitation, and the actual questionnaire. The instructions provided clear protocols and deadlines and are found in the appendices of this study.   The Questionnaire used for this study can be found in Appendix B.

Because it would be more efficient to distribute student questionnaires to everyone rather than to locate individual student's course schedules, I involved all students. Six hundred seventy questionnaires were distributed, with four hundred forty-seven (66 percent) returned with at least one answer completed. Of those completed, three hundred sixty-four (81 percent) were from freshmen (0-29 credit hours completed), sixty-three (14 percent) from sophomores (30-59 credit hours completed), and twenty (5 percent) from "other" to include those with more than sixty hours of coursework completed.   Of those who returned the questionnaires, thirty-nine (9 percent) stated they would be available for further in-depth focus group or individual interviews and provided contact information, should those be requested. These indications by the students were made on a separate tear-off sheet that was immediately removed from the questionnaire, prior to assessment of answers.   Thirty percent of the respondents reported being enrolled in Developmental Reading, 34 percent in Developmental Writing, and 95 percent in Developmental Mathematics, with 80 percent reported either have taken or are currently taking "regular" college credit classes.

I had exhausted the number of faculty members who were available for focus group interviews; therefore, I thought it would be beneficial to also use

questionnaires to canvas this group as well. Of the faculty questionnaire

respondents, 100 percent returned completed questionnaires, with eight having

full-time and eighteen having adjunct status. Although participation in the FI

interactions (conferences) was mandatory, there were no negative

repercussions for not having participated. Thus, only 62 percent full-time and 73

percent adjunct faculty participated in the conferences.   Further specific

discussion and findings regarding these questionnaires are discussed in the

upcoming chapters.

<p align="center">Focus Groups</p>

Morgan (1997) defines focus groups as "a research technique that

collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher .

. . and provides access to forms of data that are not obtained easily" (p. 9)**.** In

comparing focus groups to individual interviews, Morgan makes an important

distinction: "Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and

differences in the particpants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching

such conclusions from post hoc analysis of separate statements from each

interview" (p. 10).   Patton (2002) adds that the focus group interview is an

interview before all else, not a problem-solving or decision-making session, with

the object "to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider

their own views in the context of the views of others" (p. 386).

As is common in focus group interviews, semi-structured questions lead one participant to begin delving into an answer, with that participant's comments triggering further elaboration, confirmation, or dissent from other participants.

Patton (2002) describes the main advantage of focus group interviews centering around the enhanced quality of the data through "checks and balances" the participants offer each other, ridding the data of false or extreme views (p. 386). Moreover, Morgan (1997) describes the strengths of using focus group methodology by noting that the researcher's focus produces concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest, providing insights into participants' opinions and experiences in an efficient and useful manner. Additionally, the focus groups' "reliance on interaction in the group to produce the data" through participants' "comparisions among each other's experiences and opinions offers valuable insight into complex behaviors and motivations" and is another clear strength of focus groups (p. 13).

Edmunds (1999) describes focus group participants as "provid[ing] a flow of input and interaction related to the topic. . . that the group is centered around . . .and offer[ing] more in-deptth understanding of the target's perspectives or opinions than is otherwise attainable. . . " This methodology allows exploration resulting in an "understanding of perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and motivations." (p. 2-3)

Patton (2002) points out the limitations of the focus group interviews to include time restrictions, reduced response time by individual participants,

moderator skill, risk of losing minority perspectives, and decreased assurance of confidentiality. However, Patton further notes that the positive gains expected through such interactions outweigh the limitations, especially if the group interviews are truly focused.   Also, the use of a combination of individual and focus group interviews helps aleviate these issues.

<div align="center">Questionnaires</div>

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), surveys, considered questionnaires when administered in written form and interviews when administered orally, are the most common data-gathering technique used in descriptive research. The advantage of using questionnaires is twofold: the ability for researchers to carefully construct and validate the questions and the ease of administration. The open-ended questionnaire, such as the one used in this study, allows the participant to respond freely, without any influence by the researcher on the direction of the response. Responses are not necessarily preconceived by the researcher, thus allowing ". . . a wider latitude of possible responses from participants, and consequently, information may result that is unanticipated." Questionnaires are also "less threatening and frustrating to certain special populations of participants—e.g., undereducated, culturally different, or marginally literate" (p. 147).   When I considered my target participants, the questionnaire was another data-gathering tool useful in this study.

Because participants in this study were often difficult to schedule for focus groups or individual interviews, I used a questionnaire in order to collect data from more students to help further describe how developmental studies students perceived or interpreted their out-of-class interaction with their instructors. The survey questionnaire was a useful tool for gaining additional insights to students' experiences. Other than some additional categorical questions describing the participants and direct, two-response questions, all other questions in this survey were open-ended, thus lending itself to the same process used to analyze the focus group interviews: coding and categorizing as guided by the constant-comparative method.

The student questionnaires used in this study were distributed through all the full-time and adjunct faculty members in Spring 2007. Each faculty member received a packet with enough questionnaires for each student in every section for which the faculty member was responsible, along with a cover letter and instructions (see Appendix B). Faculty members were given two weeks to distribute and collect the questionnaires and return them to me.

<u>Validity and Reliability</u>

In this research design, reliability was assured through consistent protocols such as the use of a cover letter to motivate participants, use of clear instructions, and clarity of wording.   I met with all the participating faculty members to explain the process and provide opportunity for clarification of information contained in the cover letter. Knowledgeable colleagues read the

cover letter and instructions to their students to ensure clarity and preciseness. In addition, reliability was mostly established through corroborating data between the questionnaire and focus group responses. The questionnaires in this study were used for descriptive purposes only; however, similarities between the coded categories and responses of the focus groups and questionnaires were used to further substantiate the findings of this study.

Specifically, Suskie (1996) describes four main ways to help establish validity in a questionnaire, two of which were used in this study: comparing questionnaire results with focus group results on the same topic and comparing questionnaire results with actual student grades. In addition, the questionnaires included students from diverse backgrounds and ranges and considered the following categorical data: number of total college credit hours, number of current credit hours enrolled, number of CTC credit hours, age, marital status, living arrangements, nationality/ethnicity, number of developmental studies courses enrolled and completed, and number of college-credit classes currently taking or taken at CTC. Because students of every level and degree of experience were included, the likelihood of including a diverse range of experiences increased, lending to the validity of this study.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

According to Merriam (1998), the constant-comparative method of data analysis essentially involves comparing one piece of data with another and determining similarities and differences among the pieces. Once similarities are

found, they are grouped and named to a category, with the object of this analysis being to seek patterns in and understanding among the data. While description is considered the most basic level of analysis, it still requires "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting" the data to find meaning in the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998, p. 192). Moving beyond description requires systematic construction of categories based on patterns of concepts revealed from the data. Merriam (1998) describes this process:

> The categories are derived through a continuous comparison of incidents, respondents' remarks, and so on, with each other. . . . Units of data—bits of information—are literally sorted into groupings that have something in common, . . .are based on information relevant to the study and . . .are the smallest piece of information that can stand by itself and be interpretable in the absence of any additional information (pp. 179-80).

Once categories are described and named, either from the researcher, the participants, or other outside sources such as prior research, the researcher can then begin making inferences and theorizing about the data. The categories are conceptualized in another way that promotes a new understanding of the phenomenon being researched. It is my intention to focus on description, understanding, and interpretation of the participants' perceptions and experiences.

Merriam (2002) succinctly describes the process of data coding and the construction of categories:

Units of data deemed meaningful by the researcher are compared with

each other in order to generate tentative categories and properties, the

basic elements of a grounded theory. Through constantly comparing

incident with incident, comparing incidents with emerging conceptual

catetories, and reducing similar categories into a smaller number of

highly conceptual categories, an overall framework . . . develops.

(p. 143)

In conducting this study, I followed an inductive process because this

study sought to understand students' and faculty members' perceptions, not to

prove theory. I began by collecting the data and then analyzing them by

identifying recurring patterns and themes through the constant-comparative

method, which involved continous comparisions of one segment of data to

another. I coded the first transcript into themes by assigning a unique code to

sentences, paragraphs, or even entire sections within each transcript.and

compared these themed codes to subsequent transcripts with new codes being

added as necessary. To ensure consistency within each code, I also assigned

an explanation and definition of each code. I then cut-and-pasted the coded

copy into a separate document under the assigned code, with the interview and

page numbers included to ensure ease of follow-up questions.

I repeated this process until no new insights followed. Coded sections

were compared with other sections within that code to ensure consistency with

with others and the definition. An example of a common code used was

"learning outcome." This code was assigned to any data which referred the participant's description as what he or she learned from a particular process or methodology used by the instructor. Some sections of the transcript included no code, one code, and sometimes multiple codes, depending on the themes presented by the participants.

The next phase of this process involved taking codes with common elements and merging them to form broader categories. Like the codes, each category was defined in a separate document. An example of a category was "instructor characteristics" and codes that came under that category included the following: helpful, supportive, approachable, available, makes an effort, loving, showing concern, humorous, loves teaching, enthusiastic, improves student self-efficacy. The next step involved assigning categories to the applicable research question they addresssed and included a list of categories for each question. I note here that categories were not always neatly delineated and sometimes addressed more than one research question. Finally, I was able to begin making interpretations and gaining understanding based on the categories and how they related to the research questions.

Researchers (Merriam, 1998, 2002; Peshkin, 1993) point out, however, that theory development may not necessarily be an outcome of this process. My findings are a mix of recurring themes supported by the three data sources: focus group interviews, individual interviews, and questionnaires. Conclusions are revealed through the varied repetition of participants' storied experiences,

with understanding that, as Merriam (2002) points out, my interpretation is my understanding "mediated by my perspective of the participants' understanding" (p. 29) of feedback intervention interactions and their effects on students' and faculty members' life experiences related to teaching and learning.

In considering the descriptive purpose of the questionnaires, I analyzed those responses through various means: reports of the percentages and specific answers of those who responded in the yes/no and multiple choice sections (including the census-related questions); reports of the mean/median/mode rating for each item; typical responses to the open-ended questions; and congruency between the interview and questionnaire response categories. Albeit limited, these analyses and the resulting recommendations serve their purpose in becoming a secondary yet integral component to the overall findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The focus of this study was to better understand how Feedback Intervention (FI)--one-on-one, out of class interactions between students and their instructors--affected learning and teaching. While the students in this study all came from various ethnic, cultural, and familial backgrounds along with gender and wide age differences, they also all came with limited preparation and skills needed for college-level work. Ironically, what educators used to term as nontraditional, these students are indeed today's community college norm, and they come with new and ever-increasing challenges. Any innovations, interventions, and ideas that may help these students succeed are worthwhile, especially when considering that the students who participated in this study came ready to share their experiences, eagerly wanting to have their voices heard, and were perhaps a little surprised that someone wanted to know what their experiences of learning and participation in the FI conferences were like.

When considering the overall impact of student-faculty interactions, specifically feedback intervention (FI) conferences as described in this study, I found one overarching theme emerged: the FI conference did have a positive impact on learning and, to a lesser degree, on teaching. This theme is supported through two main findings related to learning: the FI increased students' motivation to learn and improved their learning strategies. In regards to teaching, the main finding is that facilitation of the FI interaction affected faculty

members in that they became more learner-centered in their teaching strategies and methodologies. These findings confirm a connective, dynamic learning process for both students and faculty members.

However, equally important to understanding how the FI had an impact on students and faculty members is understanding what kind of learner we are talking about. Thus, the context of the learner's world—including impressions of the learners themselves, about the Developmental Studies program in which they are placed and the faculty members who interact with them—is very important to consider. Who are these students? Getting a glimpse into their world will perhaps allow us to see them and their reactions, understandings, and perceptions in a way we would not if we focus only on what happened during the FI conference. Thus, this chapter begins first with a description of their context.

One final point: while the main focus of this study is to understand students' perceptions about their experience with the FI conference, the participants did not always clearly delineate and segment what directly related to the FI conference and what related to their learning in general. Their responses often conflated the two.

This chapter has three major sections: a description of the context in which the participants find themselves, a description of the participants' experiences with the Feedback Intervention (FI), and a description of the faculty members' perspectives on how FI helped foster learning-centeredness in their teaching.

The Context

The participants in this study must be understood within their context, so I begin with a description of them as students within the Developmental Studies Program at Central Texas College. Then I discuss their connections with their peers and with faculty members, their experiences with the College, and more specifically their experiences with the Developmental Studies Program. I will address each separately.

<u>Students</u>

The participants in this study are Developmental Studies students, which means that they are defined by their institution as underprepared; even so, their understanding of themselves as learners is positive and self-actuating. They construct a dynamic and realistic view of their abilities as learners and they trust their own assessment of themselves, thus rejecting the deficit model often used by the institution to define them. They understand learning as a complex process, not merely the accumulation of knowledge and acquisition of skills. What follows is a brief description of students' own perceptions of themselves as learners.

<u>Students' Understanding of Themselves as Learners</u>

Students in this study were confident about their understanding of themselves as learners. They recognized the relationship between enrollment in Developmental Studies (DS) and later success in college-level work. Students discussed how they would have been lost without the support and guidance of

the DS program. They discussed not only the coursework, especially when compared to traditional courses, but also the personnel and resulting connections in this program.

> I think it's [DS course] been extremely helpful in helping me progress so that when I do get into next semester, when I get into my harder classes, I'm going to be able to take what she taught me from there and then go from there. The courses that I've taken here have been very valuable, and very instrumental not only in the subject I'm taking but just in reintegrating me into that learning environment.

Other students expressed how they appreciate being guided:

> I haven't been in school since 1964 and I think as an older student coming to college for the first time, I needed some kind of "how to do everything" and that [the DS course] was a good class for that. I prefer to start at the bottom to start growing more strong. [The DS course] gave me a certain confidence that that was how to write. . . and I don't think it was any problem.

> One student described how he voluntarily signed up for the DS writing course because he wasn't sure about his capabilities after having come back from Iraq with traumatic experiences that affected his memory: "I thought it would be a good idea for me to come back and refresh on my skills, sharpen my skills because after all the things I've been going through I didn't know whether I would still have that. And it was great."

Another student describes why she enrolled in college: "When I was in high school, I enjoyed it . . . but of course I thought marriage was more important than school at the time, but of course it wasn't. But we all think that, things you know. I didn't realize how tough it was gonna be to stay out of school. But now the world's so fast that you almost have to go back to school to learn it."

In addition to recognizing the value of the DS program, students also understood their own role and responsibility in their learning.

> Me, I'm paying for my college You know my family is helping me pay for college; [it's] that type of deal. So we are sacrificing, and to me college is not something that you play with, especially when it's your hard-earned money going into something that you really wanted to do. And I want to be the best I can be with my work and get the best GPA I can. Therefore, I have to try. You know I have to want to try.

Students were also aware of how their own learning processes were formed, and this awareness was also part of the context in which the FI conference was situated. One student's awareness was evident as she explained the "stages" of her own learning and how it affected her academic decision-making:

> To me, college is about a choice; it's about you choosing to come, you choosing to pay. However, it's your choice to learn, and if you really don't have a desire to learn, you're not gonna see outside your box. You're not going to be able to get any positive vibes from anybody really except for

your own, and you're gonna pretty much be stationary in your own mind

[asking,] "Can I or can I not do this?" And if you cannot break that "I

cannot" barrier, then you're not going to. . . My instructors help because

I saw pretty much just them being so bright and willing to teach and going

over a chapter in several different ways. [This} is when I learned, "It's ok

to take these classes and it's ok to listen and actually hear them,"

instead of having [information] go through one ear and out the other.

One student who previously dropped a traditional course expressed that the

amount of homework did not help him to succeed:

No, it didn't [help me in the class]. It frustrated me it was just so much, I

was getting overwhelmed, especially, if I have my other classes and I was

working . . . so you're not really focused on how much you have to do.

You know because it's like if you have to do all this work, you're not really

focusing on the math, but you're focusing on how much of the math.

I learned better step-by-step out of the book, and you know you see the

problems in the book and I could learn it better . . . I'm not asking them, I

mean I wasn't asking them to, to be babied because, yes, I am a college

student and I'm not high school or junior high anymore. But I have been

out of school for a long time, and most students that are in here, in this

class, have been out of school for a while, so that was a little different for

us.

Another student compared her high school experience to her college experience: in high school, the teachers were "chasing after her" to get the missed work in, but in college the instructors made her realize that it was her fault for missing classes but they were still willing to work with her to help her succeed. "It did make me realize that they're not going to chase me when I need to get something done. I'm going to have to go through them, but they are open for me to go to them."

Another student talked about the physical availability of the instructor that helped him get further help:

> She would stay after class, . . . she always made it easy. . ., it wasn't like well, contact me, and we'll set something up, like my comp one teacher, like, email me if you have a question or we'll set up something where ----- [my teacher] I feel like I can just come and see her at any time and ask any kind of question like that.

The awareness expressed the intentionality of their engagement in the learning process and explained how they became an active participant. They described an understanding of themselves that included an appreciation of their experiences.

<u>Responsibility</u>

Most students agreed that responsibilities in their own role as learners are at least as important as that of their instructor in how they learn. One student, a single mother with three children, spoke to this point:

The instructors are going to care to a certain point. They're not going to

hold your hand and go, "Well, come here" and "Hell, ok you are trying.

Let me redo our grade." No, it's not about that. It's, "You're not learning.

This is your grade. I'm sorry but you can come in, there's tutorials and

stuff, people are paid. It's your choice to learn." Even if you have an

outstanding instructor and I've loved all of my instructors anyway, but I've

always listened. I actually really liked him [the DS instructor] . . . but I

think the main problem I had that semester, I took him last semester, was

because I had so many things going on at home, I mean, my GPA

dropped a lot last semester cause I was having too many problems at

home, it just made it harder.

This student's description of outside difficulties was not unusual. They often

described their own constant battle between obligations at home and work and

commitments at school. Yet they still understood that it is their responsibility to

negotiate these demands. They appreciated anything that helped them meet

their responsibilities.

It's so important, cause I try and schedule everything around the kids, I try

to every semester, but now I'm going everyday, like Monday through

Wednesday, I'm in class from 8:30 until 11;50, Thursdays until 2:50, so

and now with the kids kicked off the bus, it's pushing it a little, but I was

like, "You know, y'all are just going to have to wait a few minutes until I

get there."

She explained difficulties with the Nursing department because they offered the upper level classes with only one to two sections at times that usually did not fit her schedule. While institutions make the effort to schedule classes at various times, budgetary constraints often limit classes, giving students few options in attending classes and successfully completing their degrees.

<div align="center">Connections</div>

A central feature expressed by students of their learning experience is connection: connection with instructors who are learner-centered and connection with fellow students as part of a learning community.

<u>Connection with Instructors</u>

In discussing their own responsibility for personal connections in their academic experiences, students described the characteristics that helped foster the connections important in their learning process. For example, they talked about their instructor's willingness to help: "She said we need any help and then she was also available. I had to do a project. I had to do a term paper. It was like my first time and she volunteered to help me. And she was there to make sure you know to help me." One student described why she stayed after class to ask questions:

> Actually, I was just comfortable asking, just for the simple fact of the way
> my instructor presented themselves with the classroom, with the
> paperwork and stuff like that—I think that's very important . . . I'm not
> saying the instructor has to be overly friends, overly you know charismatic

and just want to befriend everybody, it's just a simple fact that they have a desire to learn. They have a desire to teach. And the way my instructor was teaching the class was pretty much, "How can I take all this information and take it down to its most rudimentary form in order to help my students be able to understand and grasp the concept of the work in order to pass so they can be on the college level?" And I feel that's very important because if you love teaching then the students are going to see that, if they are enough they're going to see that. . . if the student cares enough, they will be able to tell that the instructor loves teaching.

Students were able to understand the importance of building a rapport with their instructors but also noted that a good relationship, while encouraged by some instructors, often came as a result of students taking responsibility for making "the first move." This corresponds with the questionnaire in which 64 percent of students reported they would go to their DS instructor on their own, without the instructor asking. Because only 45 percent of these same students reported they would go to their non-DS instructor on their own, without the instructor asking, it can be concluded that students felt more at ease with their DS instructors when seeking help out of class.   When asked who is responsible for their own learning, 54 percent of students reported that they were responsible and 46 percent reported it was a mutual responsibility of both student and instructor; none reported it was solely the instructor's responsibility.

<u>Connection with Peers</u>

Most students agreed that equally as important to establishing relationships with instructors was establishing relationships with their peers foster their learning.   One student gave an example of peer learning: "Like a study group, you may be strong in the area, they may be weak and we all put our heads together we can help each other. So I think it's a positive thing to establish a relationship with others."

This same student described how building a relationship with fellow students, discussing personal and academic issues, helped her feel comfortable in the classroom:

> Like in reading we are talking about our life and something humorous, so before study or at most periods we are laughing and comfortable. So whenever teacher starts our subject, we are very happy because already we share our personal life and we enjoy to study together . . . so I think your classmate is important to you.

Still another student described how other students asking questions gave her confidence to also ask questions and did not make her feel so isolated:

> It depends [if I feel comfortable asking questions in class] it actually depends on the group, the other students, I guess you can say how nice they are, cause large groups make me get a little nervous and I have this "personal space" thing so . . . it seems like I'm not embarrassed to say

that I don't understand, I mean, *they* have no problem saying that they don't understand.

One student described how her fellow students have helped her learning: "We try and help each other as much as possible. . . we swap notes, if I missed a day, I know I can go to my classmates and say, 'Hey, can I have the notes from yesterday?' and 'Can you explain to me exactly what she meant?' stuff like that, there's like a couple in each class that I take where I can do that."

She also confirmed that having this bond with those students has really helped her learning and improved her success; she thought she would still pass the classes without such help but not with the better grades.   She noted that although the relationship developed out of necessity as students had to miss various classes and needed review sheets and notes, she felt enriched in having been part of these connections with peers.

One student described how his class structure worked: the students would be given two weeks to complete a program; the students would then all go to the lab and work on it together: "Everybody sits down and they all start to program. And let's say you don't understand something you'd be like I don't get this. Like four people would come over there, like dude, let me show you how to do it. They'd show you." This built-in camaraderie was integral to his success in the course.

Another student came in and told his fellow students before class about all his personal problems (divorce, car accident, job), and that he didn't think he

would finish the course.   Instead of ignoring this student, the other students came to his help: "And then we're like, 'Dude--copy, paste, here you go. All you got to do is look at it so you understand.' And like we helped him out and we just gave him the program steps; he made an 'A' on that, but if no one talked to each other in that class, only four of us would pass." This student described how other classmates came to the aid of the despondent student and explained that the process was not as complex as originally thought.

Another student described her classmates' advice:

And [my classmates] notice when I have this stressful quiz to take and they're always, just making sure if [I'm ok]: [they tell me] "Maybe you're too nervous because you sit way in front. Sit in the back. And just relax." Everybody gives me, you know, a hint or something, and Jane say, "Did you understand? Oh no, that one is wrong, which one is right? Why?" And they will start sharing. It's not that we're cheating. It's [that] we're trying to help one another. And to me that makes big difference.

Students acknowledge, appreciate, and understand what their fellow students are going through, and the natural bond created is valued and sometimes even expected.   They see themselves "in the same boat" as their peers when together they struggle through difficulties and share their accomplishments.

<u>Negative Experiences</u>

While relationships and connections help foster students' positive learning experiences, negative interactions with various parts of the institutions and negative past educational experiences in general cannot be ignored as they also form the context in which students find themselves. In fact, most students in this study described such experiences. These experiences are an important part of the participants' context in that they often don't separate themselves from those experiences, and these experiences can influence their decision-making processes regarding their schooling. For example, when they are misdirected by college staff, rather than forging on and not taking it personally, they may decide that college is too difficult to continue. Thus, equally important to understanding how these students see themselves as learners and the learning process is that students come with negative learning experiences that have an important impact on their learning. As educators, we know that not all learning experiences are positive; moreover, when the experiences are described in detail, we can understand better why meeting outside of class with one's instructor can potentially have an important impact.

<u>Negative Educational Experiences</u>

Almost all the students in this study had memories of past negative learning experiences that may have had influence on their current standing as college students. One student described her feelings of frustration: "In my math class I really feel lost, I'm frustrated, . . . and they skip from like this, we're

talking this course now, don't talk about next semester, I need to pass this semester, but they was telling us all what was gonna be in next semester, and I, that's not what we needed to know."

She described how her prior experiences formed her current perceptions and influenced her decision not to engage with her instructor. She talked about why she didn't go to her teacher to express frustrations she felt during class:

It's just the way they are, they're a teacher and the way they present their self and the way they're gonna teach their self and stuff is the way that they're gonna do it. That's the way they presented it at the first, and this is the way they're gonna do it. And they're not gonna change it . . . when any question is asked, she goes back, they go back to their slides and [she] goes back to the one step, but that doesn't help us with any other questions. I asked, "Explain why it's done that way, don't give us the answers, don't just tell us, explain why," and she said, "Well, this is back in Chapter 3."

Instead of answering the question, this student described how the teacher told her that this point was already covered in a previous chapter. The student didn't feel confident in asking further questions because she felt intimidated. The class was small, so students didn't ask questions, and when the class got released early, she felt cheated because the instructor didn't provide enough guided practice.

One student described the difficulties of her past learning experiences in that she attended four different high schools in her freshman year and two other schools in her second year. She described how confusing it was with all the changes: "I couldn't do it. I was failing, but the school where I came from [showed me one way to do the math problems.] I was doing it exactly how they showed me, but the next school that I went to said I was doing it wrong." The resulting inconsistencies from having attended so many different schools in such a short period of time continued to plague her current college math experiences.

Negative Institutional Experiences

While many students described negative educational experiences in general, others also focused more specifically on their more recent experiences with various constituencies of their current institution. Students sometimes got quite detailed regarding their interactions with certain non-instructional departments, and their specificity hinted that these feeling were still in quite raw:

> The counselors shouldn't treat everyone like they just came out of high school. An adult has experience, even probably he don't have schooling, but he got life [experience]. He know how to conduct himself in different ways, . . . and I think that we are not numbers, you know. Being [treated like] numbers, we've got other systems for that, and I don't want to mention them. But this is something that if the school want to help the students, . . . they've got to touch these points. They've got to individualize people. They cannot generalize everybody.

Another student further elaborated:

> You have such a diverse population coming into this school [because of
> the military] I would have thought that these counselors would be versed
> in people like myself, as well as the freshly graduated high school student
> . . . I have 20 years military experience, , , and the counselor [said],
> "Those experiences don't count here". . . so it goes back to devaluating
> who I am as a person. I'm not saying that that was [the counselor's]
> intentions, but that's how I felt.

Still another student described her experience:

> He [the non-DS lab worker] was very prompt to point out to us, "You are
> in a Developmental Studies [course], you belong over there [in another
> lab]." [This worker is] supposed to tutor there regardless of where you
> are from. That's the only place where I've ever been ridiculed or put into
> my place [when the tutor said,] "DS are not [tutored] here. This is strictly
> for college level." And again, I was extremely offended. . . and to hear the
> statements that he made, you know, how else would I interpret those
> [when he said,] "This is for college level only. All DS are over there."

While the students described these experiences as negative, some
almost causing them to consider leaving the program, they stuck it out with the
hope that these experiences were anomalies. This feeling was often confirmed
by the reaction of their instructors when they were informed of what happened.
Fortunately, students felt supported and welcomed the positive reactions they

received from their instructors. Thus, while these experiences should be acknowledged as being part of their educational context, they also may have influence on their current experiences with the Developmental Studies Program.

<p align="center">The Developmental Studies Program</p>

Interestingly, while students described negative educational experiences in general and institutional experiences, they often compared those experiences with their developmental studies experiences, sometimes describing a distinct "us versus them" mentality when describing the DS and regular college-credit departments and faculty. Students felt connected and a part of DS but not so much to the college-level ones, using terms like "over there" to illustrate the boundaries between the two. They were aware of the differences in expectations and support. They described a sink-or-swim versus a nurturing mentality, and they appreciated the support enveloping them within the DS program.

Generally, the main difference at most community colleges between regular college-credit and developmental studies courses is that the former does award credits towards a degree or certificate while the latter does not. Additionally, DS courses are often not funded by veteran's financial aid programs, an important distinction especially at Central Texas College where a majority of students have some military connection. While community colleges have open enrollment policies which allow anyone with a high school diploma or its equivalent to be accepted at these colleges, students must take reading,

writing, and mathematics placement tests first before they are allowed to enroll in any coursework.

Test results determine the placement of students in either regular or DS courses. However, it is important to note that many students, including active duty soldiers, are exempt from placement tests and are allowed to enroll in any coursework that pertains to their degree programs. With these stipulations as background, this section will describe students' reactions to DS placement and the importance of instructor characteristics in their learning.

Placement Within the DS Program

Most students talked about how they felt when they were told, mostly by counselors, that they had not scored high enough on placement exams to enroll in the traditional courses. Some seemed disappointed or angry at first, but all of them told how they thought the assessment, in the end, was accurate.

> In retrospect, yes. That's not the way I felt in the beginning [because of my] pride. At first I resented it, really, . . . and I redid the test and still ended up with the exact same scores which showed me that I needed to be in here . . . but now I'm seeing that had I just jumped right in, I wouldn't have been doing this. I wouldn't have been doing good at all.

Some students also gave a lot of credence and value to placement test scores as an important objective component of their assessment, but this was not always recognized right away. One student described her first reaction when being placed in DS:

Well probably not at first [that I was properly placed] because coming

back from Iraq you figure you're at the college level, but in the end I

realized that taking developmental really helped my, starting off my career

and stuff like that for the rest of my classes . . . I'm proud that I took

developmental classes because it's gonna make my other classes a bit

more, easier to understand the work, and they've prepared me very well.

Even one student who passed the placement test by one point (enabling

her to enroll in the regular college class) described how she realized she

probably still wasn't properly placed:

I did feel confident when I first started the class and then once we got

in the middle of the semester, I was like, "Wow, this is hard!" I think a lot

of students at first say, "Well, I passed the placement test, so I must be

really good" and so they go into the regular class and then realize, "Oh

maybe I do need some more refreshing."

Although students may have had some initial doubts or frustrations about

their placement in DS courses, it was a clear consensus that students

appreciated the value of those courses in helping them get started or re-started

with their academic life. Students reported in the questionnaire that they had

completed an average of 22.79 hours, either at CTC or another institution, with

80 percent reporting they have taken or are currently taking college-credit

(regular) classes at CTC. Thus, most students who participated in this study

had some college experience from which to judge the usefulness of the DS courses.

<u>Characteristics of Faculty Within Program</u>

All students agreed that the instructor's attitude, in general about teaching and specifically about the course, was very important. In addition, students noted specific characteristics of instructors that they felt had a motivational impact on their learning.

If they [the DS instructor] were there because they wanted to teach, then it's ok. They want to make a difference, then that's very important to me. If they're just there to read out of the book and act like they don't care, it's like I'm not gonna care and just leave the class. So I'll give up again. But the teachers I had were very motivational. They're very, very warming I guess. They're very nice and they wanted to teach. And you know, even I'm very, I get impatient when I get stuck on something. I always ask and ask. And like when my teacher said, "Well ok, this is how you do it" and I don't understand, he goes into more detail until I say, "Ok, thank you." So it was very important to me. And if she really has enthusiasm in to how to teach the student and I feel ok, she knows what she needs to do to teach us, and then I start enjoying coming to class.

Another student elaborates further:

I think that if a professor is not motivated enough, and he doesn't have a sense of humor, he's not confident of the subject and he's only teaching

me a subject, [then] that's [not motivational at] all. But he has to make it simple and have a sense of humor. I mean make me feel it. Otherwise I'm not learning anything. I'd rather and just go on and learn somewhere else or read a book. If the atmosphere is not right, the [learning] is not gonna be right.

Thus, while instructors may feel they have a right and perhaps an obligation to give students their opinions about aspects of the course or program that are outside the control of the faculty member, students do not always interpret those comments as mere opinion and can be influenced by such comments.

One student out of school for fifteen years described dealing with her test anxiety and the importance of teachers who care: "Like I say because I was feeling to me to make this step [talking to the teacher] was really big for me. I was scared. . . they're going to think I'm stupid, ignorant, and you know you start, everything comes, all the bad and negative things." The student then described how she appreciated her instructor understanding her personal situation and that the instructor understood where the student was coming from: "And they [explain] this for us, and when [they make] the [positive] comment to me, I was feeling like I was with the clouds. So that regardless of my result, I'm doing my best and that I know that counts for [the teacher], and I have respect for that."

Another student described how her instructor's caring and persistence helped her learning process because it forced her to keep up with the course expectations:

I probably would have tried [without her encouragement] but I probably wouldn't have tried too hard. She makes it a point to stay on me, with everything, she says, "If you have a question, ask questions," . . . and you really feel good cause I looked at my class work, all the tests and everything, and my grade was actually a B and then she showed me *My Math Lab* which was like a 65 or something like that, "If you would bring this grade up, this one grade would be a lot higher," so it's like, "Ok, I'm not doing bad at all, I just need to start doing my homework". . . so I know if I do more of this, do all of my homework, then 9 times out of 10, I might be able to get out of the class with an A . . . . It made me want to start doing my homework more.

Another student concurred:

I think the relationship really with your instructor affects your learning, I'm certain mine is very important. When I mean relationship, really it would be having positive feedback when you have important questions and things that you don't understand being able to feel inside that you can go to your instructor and I think that is very important. I guess just the positive, the wanting to see their students being able to pass their class, [you know this about your instructor] because you can see it, I mean if

you're paying attention and you care enough about yourself to learn

you can see it within your instructor.

In comparing one teacher where the student felt comfortable asking

questions versus another where she did not, the student noted,

She'll call on you and she'll ask you, "What do you think?" and you don't

feel intimidated, you don't feel like she's making you feel like you're dumb

or like you're an idiot. My [college-credit] math teacher expects us to

know [the material]; [I feel] this is why I'm taking this class because I don't

know it. [She says,] "Go to Chapter 3 [to figure this out because] you

should know this." Well, if you happen to miss a day, I know that's your

fault and you're supposed to catch up; I understand that. But she should

be around. They should be around sometimes to be able to help you but

they're not because they're part-time.

One student described the characteristics of an instructor who affects

students' learning:

One, the way they teach, being able to come in, being able to for example

write things on the board, which would should actually trigger the students

to be like, "Oh my instructor is writing; I need to write, too." The way that

they present the subject to the class, you know not just cold cut and dry

but they break it down. . .they break it down about three or different ways

for students. . . and they way they look when they come to class, if they're

vibrant and ready to go, you know ready to teach. They're not soft-

spoken, they're very upbeat and pretty much loud enough for everybody to hear, so there is not snoring, there's no going to sleep, the way they have their stuff very organized, if they're organized, who knows, maybe a student might be like, "Oh, I want to be organized, too."

While students recognized what did help them with their learning, they also were very clear about the frustrations they experienced. For instance, one student described how the instructor never started class on time and answered her cell phone during class: "It's just kind of aggravating though I mean because I'm really, I mean I'm passing, but that's about it. And I wanted to make a higher grade, and it might be better if I retook it during the day, [so] I don't get the same teacher." Students want to be respected as adults by instructors who understand students' time is as valuable as their own; they can feel disrespected as adults when this is not the case.

<div align="center">Feedback Intervention</div>

Overall, the learning experiences of the students in this study in Developmental Studies was positive: the placement process ensured students were provided what they needed for success in college and the faculty members with whom they interacted played a motivational and nurturing role. This perception was confirmed in the questionnaire which asked students whether or not the FI conference was helpful; 99 percent of students responded affirmatively, with 75 percent ranking the level of helpfulness as "very" or "extremely."   What follows now is a more specific focus on the actual Feedback

Intervention (FI) conference itself: the invitation, the perceived effects on students' learning, instructor characteristics, building bonds, and finally, comparisons with non-developmental studies instructors and courses.

The one-on-one FI conference was perceived by students as beneficial because it often confirmed or challenged students' own assessment of their learning. These interactions allowed faculty members to model a thinking process that helped students gain confidence in constructing a more realistic view of themselves as learners.

In addition to students discussing how the DS courses generally fostered their perceptions about themselves as learners, they noted how these courses also offered a sense of safety through support from their peers and instructors. Furthermore, students also noted how the DS courses**,** through the FI intervention**,** fostered their development, assessment of their learning skills, and positive decision-making when it came to their academic choices.

> For the most part, [the FI intervention has] always been quite positive . . . there's encouragement: "You're going to be fine." Help you to really zero in and help you focus on where the problem areas might be, in reaching out to you. As a result of that, I've not only reached out and got tutoring in math, but I'm getting tutoring in English even though for all intents and purposes, the test says I did fine . . . so that's made me, again, more comfortable and more at ease with the instructors in the class, and more willing to reach out for other resources, if that makes any sense.

Another student:

> . . . being able to accept I have a deficiency, not that I'm a bad person or getting rid of all that negative stuff. I'm not a bad person. I just don't have that skill so in developing that skill in the process I've been able to see other shortcomings other areas where I could benefit from additional resources such as the English, I'd like to take advantage of the extra tutorial assistance that's out there.

<div align="center">Importance of Invitation</div>

Students described the importance of feeling invited to the FI conference, as opposed to having a summons issued (as is the usual institutional policy when calling a student to a meeting).

> For me, how I was approached initially, and the fact that I was approached, made it easier for me, and willing to go to her. As a result of each [FI] conversation, I'm now more comfortable at any point after class, or even during class when asked to raise a question.

Several students explained why they felt positively about being invited to the FI interaction, an interaction that clearly helped them build connections:

> I wouldn't feel bad [if the teacher asked me to meet with her] because I know that teachers have some concern about me to be asking me to stay aside. . . . I would look at it in a positive way because this teacher is taking time to let me know, so I would look at that as a good teacher.

Whereas having a teacher that doesn't say anything at all and don't show

no sign of concern, I wouldn't look at that as being positive.

"I think it would be an opportunity for me to grow intellectually, to share you

know conversation with a professor, and I would be actually feeling very glad

that he has taken the time to invite me, to talk to me either for schoolwork or

anything else." This student, like others, connected learning with caring

relationships; those relationships also helped foster the level of comfort many

students expressed as important to their learning process.

The student described how one teacher [full-time] made a great effort to

invite students to see them outside of class, so students felt welcome and

comfortable; on the other hand, another instructor never invited her to see him

outside of class, and so she never did. He would go when asked to meet

outside of class but had some reservations: "Well, I probably would be nervous

because you know trying hard, you don't want to be brought in for anything

wrong. . . some detail [about the purpose of the meeting] would help." When

asked, "Do you think you would be a different college student today without this

one-on-one interaction?" students responded: "Truthfully, I think I would have

quit because the educational system has been changing so much . . . you're [the

college student] responsible on your own for everything"; "Oh, absolutely, [the

FI interaction has affected my learning] in a positive way because I was able to

get the answers that I needed to be able to keep studying and understand my

work"; "[I think I seek this extra help] because I love learning and you know even through other students don't do it, that's on them."

Still another student described the experience of being invited to the FI interaction and the cultural difference between student-teacher relationship in Korea compared to the US:

The first time [meeting with my teacher] I'm gonna be very nervous because I'm not used to talk to with the teacher. In my country sometime [when] we talk too much to our teacher, we're rude. Sometime they give [students a] hard time in the class, so we are not used to, even [if] the teacher [says it's] ok. But here I'm kind of nervous but, on the other hand, I wonder, "Maybe I can talk with my instructor." So, it's a good chance to know her or [for her to] know me, so I mean later I am nervous but I'm gonna be very positive. [In Korea] even though I disagree, I cannot speak; [I have to] just keep [comments] in my mind. So whenever my teacher [here] want to see me, I probably nervous at first, but later I know here the whole teacher try to help student and I knew that, so I will be glad to meet her.

Another student's comment: "She's a cool teacher because she makes you feel comfortable and not scared." This student described how his instructor would ask all kinds of questions to make him feel comfortable: "Do you understand? Do you need to talk? Do you want me to go over it with you?" Participants all

agreed that instructor's willingness to meeting with students outside of class is a positive thing. "It's really telling you that the teacher cares."

While students did have a positive attitude about voluntarily going to their instructors outside of class, feeling that the instructors are there to help, some students also described how the interaction would never have taken place had the instructor not extended the invitation: "I probably would not go to instructor's class if she didn't ask . . . I've never really gone to my English teacher when I probably should have . . . [my DS instructor] has come up to me, and she's made it, I feel, easier, like I can just go to her anytime, compared to my other classes [where I don't feel this way.]"

One student described how she would go see her instructors on her own, but only if she felt comfortable enough to trust the instructor:

Yeah, cause I have this thing about groups, and it's, I can't explain it, I just don't talk well to strangers, and I have, it's this trust issue that I have, if I trust you then I don't have a problem talking to you. . . [The DS instructors] make me comfortable because] they were really nice, they'd speak to you like, I guess you would say, they didn't speak down to you. I don't like it when somebody speaks down to me. "I know I don't understand, but that's no reason for you to speak down to me."

Thus, feeling comfortable and trusting that the instructor would treat the student with respect were important in making the FI interaction a positive experience for students.

Effect on Learning

All participants expressed how the FI interaction positively affected their

learning:

> Yes [it has helped my learning], definitely. When she started breaking it
>
> down to me and showing me, look, you know, showing me in the book
>
> and pointing things out, that's when it became a lot more clear to me,
>
> what was what-- and I think that having a good relationship or at least
>
> being able to as you walk in you start talking. Our whole class got where
>
> we met at least fifteen minutes prior to class and we'd sit and gee, did you
>
> do homework, and we'd help each other. She encouraged me to let other
>
> people in my class help me and me help them.

While this point was confirmed by other students in the group, students

also commented on what they thought was unique and particularly helpful about

the one-on-one:

> I think [meeting your teacher outside of class] does have an effect on my
>
> learning because they're seeing me about my learning. So I think that
>
> whatever a teacher is speaking about--things to tell me that I need to
>
> work on, yes, I think the same [that it is positive]. I see like a new tract of
>
> teaching where the instructors are telling you ideas, so you can [improve].
>
> And I've seen it like three times already through different instructors. And
>
> I think it's a good idea you know because it's true: we got a potential to
>
> be there, in their shoes, maybe if we work hard enough, so I think [it's

helpful]. Yeah [the one-on-one really helps me because] it seems like

when it's a larger group for me, it seems like everything is just moving too

fast, so I don't, I mean I'm trying to work on what they're showing me, but

then they're moving so fast that I can't keep up sometimes.

Students also described how their metacognitive skills were affected.

One student described how she realized, through a discussion she had during

the FI interaction, why it became important to her to not just get the bubble test

back but also to go over the test questions: "You get your bubble sheet, but that

doesn't tell me where I'm deficient, like what you're pointing out, which is not

advantage to where they do the things here." She noted how it had become

important to her to go over the test "right away, as soon as possible."

Because I can really relate to what you are saying and I can probably say

that you are here. . . and if you spent a lifetime . . . set in your ways . . .

thinking or using grammar and speech in a particular way, it's become

second nature to you . . .you have no clue that there's something wrong,

or to look to see if there's a pattern.

The student described how one non-DS instructor would not allow the students

to see the actual test after they took it: "But it's like, well, what value it that to me

then? I don't know where I am deficient, . . . what good does it do us if we can't

look at it [the test] and say, 'Ok, this is what we got wrong' . . . . Telling me how

many I got wrong is not helping me." The student then went on to describe a

new system used by her school district where the students are given feedback

by how well they meet certain prescribed objectives rather than grades.

Other techniques learned from DS instructors during the FI interaction:

Take the test and go back home and cover up your answers and try to

redo the test . . .you can go to the math lab and see the answer key if you

get stuck on a problem, see what you did wrong, which I find is a lot

helpful for that class; She's [the instructor] is trying to get us [students] to

the point where we can catch our own mistakes, so she doesn't have t do

them, catch them for us, . . . it's getting better.

All students were in agreement that instructors did offer additional help

and suggestions during their interventions; these students followed up and took

advantage of the additional resources such as Project PASS and Learning

Resource Center (LRC) tutoring.

FI as Helping Bridge HS and College

When asked whether or not the FI interaction made them a different

college student than without the interaction, one student responded by

discussing her difficulties with transition from high school to college and talked

about how the DS class and especially the FI interaction helped her. The

student talked about what she and her instructor discussed during the FI

conference:

You are responsible on your own for everything. Yeah, the first year, it

was break out. You go to school; you don't do what you have to do, you

don't learn, that means you're not good. But the developmental, what it's

doing is . . . it's a guide, but it's still going to be a shock when you get to

the college phase . . . It's a big different phase.

Another student discussed a similar point during his FI conference:

In college, like I always heard before, like, college was hard, and you're

pretty much on your own, the professors all expect you to know

everything. . . . even knowing that, . . . [the DS instructor] made me feel

like I didn't have to know that. She was willing to teach me. She was

willing to get me ready for that, . . . but I think she really helped me to

prepare for that level, like just an extra step between high school and

college. I think she's getting me there.

He elaborates: "Like through high school and stuff, I never studied. I'm pretty

bad. But [the DS instructor] kind of made it like to where she comes up to me,

and she's, like, 'Are you studying?' Or she kind of—it's like personal. She's just

making sure that I'm keeping on top of my stuff. "

Another student describes this "bridge":

It's like a stepping stone from the transition from high school to college.

And without me going and talking to my professor [during the FI

conference], I probably wouldn't have did as well. And when I did speak

with them during the meeting, with both of my professors, we sat down,

and we actually reviewed over some thing—stuff that I already knew, you

know, points. I just didn't know how to go about reviewing it, so I

probably would have, I would have failed or something, . . . if I hadn't

talked to them at all.

Another student talked about how she would not have made it without the FI

interaction: ". . . You hear in the elementary or secondary schools about the 'lost

child' kind of thing. That's where I think I might have been in the sense of the

college setting. Again, the feeling of frustration, or failure, or unable, or

inadequate kind of thing. I don't think I would probably have continued to press

on." These students described DS courses and faculty members as providing

that "stepping stone" connecting high school experience to their current college

experience; without this connection, many would have fallen through the cracks

and not continued with their higher educational goals.

<u>Faculty Member Characteristics</u>

The FI interaction allowed instructors to share experiences with students

on an individual level, where the focus was personalized. One student

described how his DS instructor helped him gain confidence during the FI

interaction to go to his regular instructor's office after a test so he could see what

he missed:

And I'm not looking at what I got right, I'm looking at what I got wrong,

and again, I would not have done that had [the DS instructors] turned me

onto it here, to go back to look . . . . "Look, just take a look and see if

there's something there--a common pattern. Look to see if you can see

something that maybe you're doing wrong, if that makes any sense, not

necessarily wrong but where you are weak at, so you know what to go back and focus on." That's what [my DS instructor] does. He goes over, afterwards, we go over the test, and I think that that is very beneficial because I wasn't used to that. Once I go out there, I will know that maybe I do need to go to my professor's office and say, "Can I see the test to what I did?"

Many students described how the FI conference helped them build up trust in their instructor and eventually the system:

The [negative things] wasn't the emphasis. It was, "Okay, here's where we're at, here are the things that I'm able to identify, what do you think we can do or what do you think I can do to help you?" The meeting broke down all the kind of things where you naturally want to send up   the flags and the walls, like, "I don't want to be offended, I don't want to be hurt." So breaking down those barriers was vitally important.

This trust became important in many ways:

By her inviting me to come see her, I became comfortable with her, and was able to open up to her. I was more inclined to trust their judgment, or more willing to listen to what they had to say, because I didn't see it as an attack on me as a person, or an attack on my skills. It was, "We've got something to build on. Let's build on it. Let's find out what we can do together to overcome whatever problem areas you've having, to include testing anxiety."

The relationship between comfort, trust, and learning was a theme expressed often and emphatically.

> She helped me to accept, "Okay, I have a deficiency." Not that I'm a bad person, or getting rid of all that negative stuff. I'm not a bad person. I just don't have that skill. So developing that skill, in the process, I've been able to see other shortcomings, other areas where I could benefit from additional resources, such as the English, so I've stepped into the arena and said, okay, I'd like to take advantage of the extra tutorial assistance that's out there, and take advantage of that.

Clearly, the instructor's nurturing role in helping the student see herself in a positive light became the crux of this student's ability to understand and truly believe that learning is about improving skills.

> Many students talked during the FI interaction about their learning experiences in terms of their fears, often manifested in past negative academic and non-academic experiences, and how these feelings affected their learning and academic decisions.

> I'm not an approachable person—for some reason I can't go to their [instructor's] office. I can't approach them at all. The only time I feel comfortable talking to them is in class. See, if class is over, business is closed for me. For some reason, I don't like to share—for some reason, I don't like to share this because I don't want to be looking—maybe that's

my fear, I don't want to be looking like—I don't want them to treat me differently than everybody else. I want to be treated the same.

The student then described how the only time she did see her instructor after class was when a test was returned and the instructor made the comment that she didn't understand why the test results didn't reflect what the instructor felt was her true abilities. The student credited her instructor with identifying her test anxiety:

[The instructor said,] "I don't understand why you don't match the test."
And she did want to know. Like she discovered it was something wrong
with me, you know. The professor discovered that, and she's the one who
found that [test anxiety] out . . . well, she didn't find it out. I know about it,
but I don't share it because I don't want to be treated different. My goal is
to reach the point that I –I can keep going. I know I have a very severe
case . . . and that [the fact that the professor cared enough to discover
this on her own] tells me—that's why I was trying to talk about it because
that one-on-one interview, you know, is very important, is very important.
And I know I don't have the strength to do it, but for me it was successful
at the point that my professor noticed something that was so important.

At this point, the student during the interview was interrupted by another student confirming a similar experience:

That was my experience. Had it been for—very lovingly, I might add,
being able to address that. I can—I suffer from that, . . . I've actually

been checked out, and I do suffer from test anxiety. I was completely

clueless, embarrassed in one way, like she's pointing out, it was

embarrassing to think, "Ok I have a barrier, if you will, a learning barrier,"

but the way [the DS instructor] approached it, and the fact that she

encouraged me, helped me.

Another student confirmed her feelings of how important it was to her not to feel

or be treated as different and how the FI interaction with her instructor helped

her negotiate through those feelings:

Yes, I'm in the disability program because my—I didn't have no intentions

to go in [to see my instructor] because nobody wants to be seen as

different. But their approach, again, I really have to respect. I mean,

once if the teacher realize there's a problem, some of them are more

understanding than others. But they have that knowledge and they are

willing to work with you and they try to make those allowances and that is

true over here [in the DS courses]. If it hadn't been for the way I have

been dealt with here by the instructors on this side of the house, I don't

think I would be as effective in taking advantage of what's available to

me.

Through the FI conference, the instructor played an important role in helping

students negotiate those fears and turn them into something positive.

The perceived effectiveness of the FI conferences by the students related

to the bonds that were formed through the learning experiences. These

students appreciated the efforts their instructors made to help them succeed in the course. They felt a bond with their instructors that helped them forge trust in these relationships. In addition, the level of comfort felt by students was a key factor in their learning process and was often expressed. As noted by one student,

> One of the things that I've really valued is the type of people . . . that I've encountered in DS because, you know, they don't come in as condescending, belittling you. They made me feel comfortable, not feel alone, a lot of encouragement, able to point out, "Ok, here's your strengths," but [they also] let us know your shortcomings, but again, without using words like "shortcomings."

While the FI experience itself was valuable, it was also very important to students in how they were approached, and the attitude that their instructors had toward them (different from traditional instructors):

> He is able to come down to your level and make you feel comfortable and his equal, and hey, you can be like me . . . and I think part of the reason for doing that was a motivator or to try to share with people, look this is where I came from, and this is where I'm at today, . . . and when he does that [share his personal story], it's like he's got his hand out to you, saying, hey, look, *you* can come right along with me. . .*you* can achieve .

When asked if there was a specific characteristic of instructors that would make the student feel welcome to go to their office hours and/or meet them outside of class, one student responded:

> To me, it's approachability, the way he speaks to people. Again, I don't get intimidated by professors. But I just took a class with a professor that was a great person. There is a professor that comes in and delivers a lecture and earning a salary and there is a professor who has time to care for students. [The good professor] took the time to talk to students. He helped you build your self-esteem and confidence, self-confidence. And I think that's what teaching is about. You know, build your self esteem, not come in and say, "Hey I got a Ph.D." So what? What kind of human being are you? I mean, that's the way I feel. But I think if the professors have an environment where you can talk to them as a person. It's a growing experience for the students.

Another student concurred:

> Yeah, I love when they're concerned about like making you feel good, encourage you. Like, because I know studying you have to feel like you're doing little bit better at least instead of not any result. So I found out that my teachers would always say something that encouraged you. And I like that a lot. To me that makes big difference because you feel like maybe you're not having a 100% but at least you know that you're doing better. . . and having a nice way to respond [to] me.

Building Bonds

In contemplating the FI interaction, students discussed how important their relationships were with their instructors in helping the students succeed. Students perceived the FI conference as being successful because it built on the centrality of relationships and bonding to students' learning. They expressed how meeting with the instructor during the FI conference helped them break down negative perceptions and build positive feeling towards their instructor, making them more apt to interact with their instructors on a more regular basis.

> I think if you have a good rapport with your teacher, it helps you to understand how they're teaching. And if you have a teacher that you, you have a personality conflict with, sometimes it can be a reason why you don't pay attention as well in that particular class.

Another ESL student described the process by which she felt comfortable asking questions:

> Well for my experience I had a really good relationship with every teacher so there I get more than just learning from class. So like I'll do outside of a class a project with my professor and do more work with them. . . so make myself feel better than then it's more stronger than just the one subject I'm learning in, and then for right now, feel comfortable and like I probably brought a couple question to [my instructor] too and you know open my kind of private life also which is that helps me a lot because I have to feel comfortable and then you know open mind and ask

questions. And so for me yeah I think it's very important to have some

good relationship with the instructor and it helps like more than just

staying in class.

She then described that her "first impression" was what helped her feel

comfortable with the instructor because of a commonality in philosophy. The

instructor didn't curve the quiz grade because the class average was 70 percent;

the student agreed that the instructor's high expectations were what she would

strive for as well in her own classroom. This commonality was discussed during

the FI conference and helped form the bond she formed through subsequent

out-of-class meetings with her instructor.

Another student concurs:

I usually go out of my way to kind of make I guess a relationship with my

teacher, . . . to have a one-on-one relationship with your teacher because

you're gonna get more out of it than if you just sit in the back and go to

class and turn your homework in and then walk out the door and never

even ask a question.

When specifically discussing the FI conference, students again discussed

the importance of the connections made with their instructors, connections that

fostered trust in the guidance offered. This relationship felt unique and special,

and students appreciated the advice they received during the FI interaction,

advice they felt they would not have received in the regular classroom:

I think the one thing that a teacher advised was to get into a study group. And the study groups, you know you can compare your notes and maybe they caught something that you missed, while you were writing this down, and they caught it. Yes, it [FI interaction] helped me in a way. My instructor met with me outside of the class and it motivated me to get more into my studies, to do more research far as the library.

Another student concurred and described how it made her feel when the instructor, although empathizing with her life circumstances (shared earlier after class), explained to the student during the FI conference her expectations passing the course:

And she was like, "I know you can do it" It just made me, it just made me think like she cared. And I didn't want to fail the class only because I didn't want to feel like because I know she thinks I could do good, so I want to prove that I do good in class and I could pass. So that was very important for me. It's like my mom. It's just like if your momma tell you I'm proud of you. You can do this. You know you got it. And I don't want to let her down.

The link this student makes between her instructor and her "momma," to a personal relationship, reiterates the point that she does not separate her academic life from her everyday life. The bond has become strong enough to where the line between those two lines is blurred. It is this bond that helps enable her to succeed in her coursework and in her college experience. For the

students in this study, it is the connections and bonds formed through the FI conference that played a major role in their motivation and learning.

While connections with faculty members were important to students in their learning process, students also described other connections such as those with their peers. These connections often were suggested by faculty members during the FI conference as a learning strategy.

> In my reading class, they separated us in groups. And the group I'm in is very friendly and you know we talk outside of the group, outside of the class. And they've been real helpful to be because they've both been in school for a little while, so they know I haven't, so they've been real, real helpful with me, but my [non-DS] math class is completely different: there's one person in there that kind of talk a little bit, but you know it's just that it's kind of like the guys talk to the teacher and the girls just don't talk. . . . Nobody asks questions and nobody, I don't know maybe, everybody catches on. I mean everybody know what they're doing maybe. I don't know. Or everybody's like me and don't want to ask. I don't know.

The understanding expressed by students often included references to connections they felt with fellow students.

<u>Comparisons with Traditional Instructors and Courses</u>

For the students who had experience with both DS instructors and traditional instructors, their overall impressions were positive regarding their DS instructors, especially when it came to the topic of out of class availability:

[The regular teachers'] focus isn't—I don't know how to explain it—their focus isn't on the individual. It's more of a collective kind. And they are usually going at a higher rate and a faster speed. They don't have a lot of time to give you. Your DS instructors have a lot of time to give you one-on-one and the focus is there. I think they're more in tune. My instructor is able to come to me and say, "Here are some things that I've observed," which is a good thing because in the beginning, feeling the way I did, I don't think I would have asked her. It was her approach to me that made me feel comfortable in looking at those areas that I was weak and be willing to accept additional criticism and other resources. The professors are available almost all the time; it's like that old business cliché, we exist because of our customers, and again ------ [my instructor] has always been, "I am here because of you. Please take advantage of me."

One student described her appreciation of her DS instructor's understanding that she may not be where she should be as a college student regarding her skill level:

[Traditional instructors] are always in a hurry . . . or, "This is where you should be at. . . . You're at the college level now, you know, you should

already [know this]." There is an expectation you should already be

there. "I don't have the time," . . . but that's part of the critical part—I don't

think I could have done it with my regular college professors hadn't the

folks [in DS] helped me break down some of the barriers, again one of

the self-image, but being comfortable enough and confident enough to

go forward and ask a question even though it may be ridiculous in the

eyes of everybody else . . . . I don't think I'd have been able to do that

[take initiative to seek help].

Another student agreed: "I think the teachers in the DS class because they want

us to pass so much, they want us to learn that they give more of themselves

where in some of the other classes, 'I teach this and that's it. If you have a

problem, talk among yourselves,' quite often is what you have to do."

Another student further concurred:

The teachers in DS classes I find will stay after class and work with us

one-on-one to help us because they can see you're struggling and if this

week we all fell behind and we'll go over it again in two classes

instead of just one, where a regular teacher [says,] 'I've this amount to

teach in these many weeks, and if you're falling behind, read your book or

whatever' . . . you have to catch it yourself. They have to keep moving;

they don't wait for you.

When asked whether they were invited to see their regular instructors outside of

class, the response: "No, to me they're telling me if we have any problem

understanding something, they have a special place called Project PASS"
[tutoring].

> I felt more comfortable going to a DS teacher [outside of class]. I don't
> know if it's because most DS teachers are younger and not so much for
> me but probably for a lot of the other students in the class they would be
> more their age . . . sometimes I got the impression from a [regular]
> professor that I should have this already, . . . that for my age, I should
> have already gone to college.

Another student with English as a second language described her efforts
to see the regular instructor outside of class to seek extra help: "So the only
help he said was get with somebody who takes good notes." She then
described how he "goes fast too but it's not his fault" because of the summer
session and a lot of the native speakers also thought he went too fast. She
explained how she doesn't want to hold the class up with her translation
questions because it's the summer and there's not much time.

Participants all agreed that they would see their instructor for help, even
without an invitation and would continue to go even after a negative experience
(like the one described with the ESL student). "Well, I got to know what I need
to know." Thus, while some students felt they were not always treated as adults
with respect especially to their time, they valued their DS instructors' interest in
their learning and willingness to help outside of class.

One student described the camaraderie she felt in the DS course when compared to her traditional course:

It seems in the developmental class, it's like everybody is, it's not just me struggling, everybody else is struggling, and they need just as much help as I do and we actually help each other out in there also because if I understand something and somebody else doesn't understand, I don't have any problems explaining something to them . . . [and that doesn't happen] at all in the regular class.

She went on to explain more specifically the problem she faced in the regular class as she made her comparison:

I think it is just, I'm finding it hard to understand some of the professors, if I know they explain it the best way that they can but I'm just got getting it so when I'm asking a question a lot, I can see it seems like a lot of them get frustrated cause I'm asking the same question over, I'm trying to explain to them what I'm trying to ask and they're trying to explain it to me but they're not understanding what I'm asking and I'm not understanding what they're explaining. . . and once I get frustrated, my mind just shuts off, it's like, "Ok, I'm quitting."

These students did indeed appreciate the level of support they received in the DS program, from their instructors, and from their peers. This support became especially important to their persistence because not all experiences with the institution and other personnel were positive. In fact, the glue that

seemed to keep them from withdrawing came from the support from the DS program, especially as it was manifested during the FI conferences.

Learner-Centered Teaching

In considering the faculty data, although the FI interaction did not seem to have as important an impact as it did for students, this experience reminded faculty members about a very important point: various interconnected contexts all influence the experiences and abilities of their students. For some faculty members, however, this interaction had even greater impact because it emphasized for them that students are individuals who come with an individual context that should be recognized and validated.   The FI conference allowed many faculty members to reconsider some of their approaches to teaching and most importantly, attitudes about their students in that they focused on being learner-centered in their teaching decisions.

Perceived Value and Concerns

Since learner-centered environments consider students' perspectives and experiences paramount, faculty members recognized that the FI intervention had indeed an important impact for developmental studies students.

> I think it's just something you have to do regardless, whether that was a requirement mandate or not. I think any teacher here would make an effort to attempt somehow, maybe perhaps not a scheduled time like this was perceived to be, talking to students at the end of class, making comments on their papers, catching them down the hallway, talking to

them there, you know. I think these procedures are a little bit more documented and more concrete when I think that most of us do these things on a daily basis but maybe not document it as much.

While some faculty members commented that they already felt overwhelmed with institutional paperwork, they still saw the value in the interaction and often offered suggestions to simplify the process: "Personally, I don't like to document. I've got enough paperwork to do on my own."   She then makes a suggestion for improving the form:

> I've been around a long time, y'all, so the thing that my faculty members that work with me and my staff in the development, in the writing and the reading—reading asked if we could come up with a form that could be a little quicker. Instead of saying no, I'm not going to do it, let's try to find a way that will fit our needs better, more productive, and still do what we're required to do.

She presented an alternative**:** "I just simply brought them in and I said, 'Ok, you have to establish a plan to stay in my class,' so I put the responsibility on them."

Noted in the alternative is that she still meets with the student one-on-one outside of class to address the student's issues; she just modifies the interaction to fit her and her student's needs. She justified her method:

> I've decided now that I am going to do more putting the responsibility on them because I think this is a problem with DS students. They come here and we have singled them out and they have problems, so let's baby

them. I think it's time that we stop that. They are grown adults. They're

not eighteen. A lot of these are twenty-five, thirty. They are just coming

back. So I'm going to try it and see.

Instead of the faculty member filling out the form to indicate the student's plan of

action, the student writes the plan him or herself. Doing so requires reduces the

paperwork for the faculty member while promoting an active role for the student.

Another faculty member had concerns with the actual procedure: "I didn't

understand how we were going to assess the quality across all of us because I

talked to more of my peers, everybody was looking at it differently. There was

no way to compare what we were doing." She then presented another

alternative: "So I wondered if we cold have a kind of a checklist. And I realize

it's going to be different from math to English, to make it easier. And then from

what you were just saying, I'm thinking a second page with a checklist for the

student."

While one of the faculty members expressed a concern about her

students feeling hesitant or apprehensive when approached about the FI

conference, in the student focus groups and individual interviews, none of the

students felt embarrassed or singled out. Some did express being a little

nervous at first because they weren't sure what the topic of discussion would be,

but once the professor explained that they were not in trouble, they had no

further issues. This nervousness may have been what the faculty member

noted. Furthermore, in the student questionnaires, the question asking how they

felt when they were invited to the FI, 80 percent of the responses were categorized as positive: comfortable, not ashamed, appreciative, curious, helpful, fine, etc.

Faculty members in the focus group also felt strongly that, while lack of skills was indeed a hindrance to their students' success, it is lack of purpose, lack of motivation, and general apathy that is a greater impediment to their success. One faculty member discussed her FI experience:

> I read their first paragraph, and I was almost in tears. It made me want to cry. They couldn't write a sentence but they did fantastically on their final paragraph. [During the FI conferences], I saw their progress throughout the semester. It was great; they had internal motivation. . .they had that drive to go ahead and finish—"No I don't want to be in here, but this is what I have to do to finish the class."

<u>Faculty Perceptions about FI Experience</u>

When asked about the specific process regarding the FI conference, one instructor commented:

> I used the initial [conference] more for—some of the questions I asked them, but more for goal setting and what do you expect from me, . . . I think when you have them to set goals and not necessarily go by the questions that are on that list [the conference form], but initially to have them to set goals, then when they come back. . . .they know the purpose, and I always let them know, "This is more for you than it is for me, so I

would like for you to be honest with me and tell me exactly how you feel

about this and how you feel about coming to see me this extra time or

the way you feel about staying after class."

She went on further to describe what she learned as a result of the FI

conference was a hindrance for her students: "And so I sometimes I think if that

requirement [the computer lab] had not been there, they would have probably

stayed with the program . . . and finished because their goal was to finish but

they are more focused on what they needed to do in class rather than going to

the lab."

Another faculty member discussed her support of the conferences:

I think we all responded "Yes" [my students would still be in this class

without the conferences] but I think their performance may not have been

as adequate. I think by doing that and saying, "Hey, we think you can do

better," that shocked some of those students and they began to

perform better because they saw, "Here are the standards that we expect

from you." I think they came here with what was acceptable standards—

just getting by with it. Now, they are being told this is not acceptable if

you want to perform and to succeed.

Another faculty member agreed: "My students didn't realize all the

resources. Once we talked about the resources, he ran and grabbed all of them.

I think he might have still been there [in college], but he would not have been

doing as well."

On the topic of singling out students, a perceived negative behavior, one faculty member explained: "I talk in general a lot because that way I don't have to pinpoint students. I always talk to them as a group about all the different resources. I think sometimes students need that little push. Some of them refuse to go use the resources anyway, and there's nothing we can do about it."

<u>Getting to Know Students Better</u>

During the FI, faculty members learned many things about their students that gave them reasons to, at minimum rethink, and perhaps even revise curricular decisions (for example, the amount of homework assigned). It also helped faculty members see what other factors not within their control may play important roles in their students' experiences. When students shared experiences during FI regarding their academic decision-making, faculty members noted important issues brought up by students: course load and counselor/ advisor roles. Students also commented on the amount of homework which they felt was sometimes overwhelming.

In contemplating the FI topics of discussion, one faculty member commented about how students today are different from in the past:

Time constraints [as a reason for students not taking advantage of resources], because we are working with another type of student. The student today is so unique. I mean, our community college student is no longer—the traditional student is no longer traditional. But our students are multi- ages, multi-diversity, and multi-tasked as far as what they have

to do. They are to –they're working 40 hours a week. They are parents. They are single parents at the time being because husband or wives are overseas serving our country. And they're trying to fulfill their obligations and still succeed here. So they are different. Some of them, they just don't have the time to fit in.

Another faculty member described how one of her students consistently got a "D" on her papers, but on her research paper which was longer and worth more points, she got a "B." She asked the student what she felt was the difference was between her first paper and the current one. The student said she works 40 hours and has a 7 month-old baby. When she did the research paper, her mother took care of her baby and she went to the library. She said, "I can't if I'm writing it here [at home where] the washing machine is going, I have all these things I have to do. It's like a difference between night and day."

When asked whether the personal information that they learned during these conferences affects them as an instructor, one faculty member responded with a description of a student who she thought was pregnant and always had a wonderful smile on her face but ended up having to drop the course:

She came to me and said, "Dr. ----, I couldn't be here, I lost my baby." I felt so bad because I always thought I knew my students. Yeah, it changed me. I felt bad because I thought, "Oh, my God, I should have picked up on the fact why was she being absent, and why from that smile why was it not a smile anymore."

Another faculty member agreed but she explained how sometimes knowing too much is really discouraging for her because she sees how students make the wrong decisions. She described how one student was getting behind and kept getting progressively worse as the semester went on. After having spoken to the student out of class, the instructor found out the student had gotten a second job to pay for a car, and "she needed this and she needed that."

The instructor explained how she advised her to stay with her parents a little longer and make school her priority rather than these other things. The student continued to do badly and eventually dropped the course.

> I think the tidbits help because I hate to just see someone disappear. If there's a reason and they say I can't do it, then I'm fine with that, and I'm sympathetic to them. I've been in school, too. I know what they're going through. But, yeah, the tidbits help. It's amazing how much you just look at a crowd of people and they're not humans, but when they tell you what's going on in their lives, it definitely humanized them, and you can be more sympathetic to what they're going through.

Another faculty member agreed and added: "The same thing goes for them, too. They get to know you, too." So while learning about their students is an important aspect to discovering who their students are, instructors also welcome the fact that this process is indeed reciprocal and students find out their instructors are human as well.

Toward Learner-Centeredness

One faculty member explained how she's a very private person, but in the one-on-one,

> I have a tendency to sympathize with them and let them know I actually
> started school at CTC and I had to take developmental classes myself.
> So it helps them to realize that oh, I'm not going to be stuck here forever.
> If she can do it, then I can do it too. Some people think that I'm a little
> crazy for telling them that. But other people think it's possible that, you
> know, you can go on and do other things. For me, it's a full circle type of
> thing. I'm very discreet about what students I tell.

Another faculty member described an unintended outcome of meeting with students in her office:

> When they come in the office, I have an ego bookcase. . . my students
> will look at that, and they'll go, golly, what are these things? Well, this is
> from a student that I worked [with], this is from my class one time, this is
> from another student. But you know, you keep that. That's a story that—
> of a young man who just graduated with his master's. "What? In your
> class?" This is one of my students who sat there, sulked, upset, did not
> want to be in my class. He teaches Spanish at Westwood now. Oh,
> you're telling us that students succeed? I said, "Yes, they do."

When asked how many of their students would have come to the conference without being invited, they agreed that less than half to none would

have come on their own. They also described how scary it was for some of their

students:

> I have a student who was similar to [another faculty member's] student in
>
> that he was—I think he felt he was in trouble. He finally did come and
>
> see me, but he felt he was in trouble. He wouldn't look at me. He was
>
> shaking like a leaf. I felt so bad for him. I wanted to say, "You are not in
>
> trouble. This is fine. We can look past this." He wouldn't look at me.
>
> However, he did show some improvement. I don't think he ended up
>
> passing the class, but he did show improvement after he spoke with me.
>
> I think sometimes they think they are in trouble, or that you think they're
>
> stupid. I made sure to tell them, "You have fantastic ideas."

When asked how they believed their students reacted to the FI

experience, one faculty member tried to explain why she felt they did have a

negative attitude about coming outside of class to see their instructors:

> The fear they're had—the counselors, tell them, "Go see your counselor."
>
> They have a negative attitude on that. They have negative vibes on that.
>
> I don't want to go see a counselor. I think they're here with the wrong
>
> impressions of what the roles of—or the perception of the
>
> student/teacher. I guess they are used to not talking a lot. So when I tell
>
> them they're going to interact, that's a problem.

Another faculty member questioned her student's intentions after she

spent time giving advice about how to succeed in the math class: "I don't think

she has any intention of making the commitment. I mean, it was evident the whole time. Even me trying to suggest something that might help her, she had no intention."

The participants described how their students latched on to the advice about extra resources and tutoring: "My student jumped right in. He had a tutor every week. He me with me every week to make sure we were where we needed to be."

I think sometimes we would, especially those who have come back really, and they have following through with the goals that they have set, the steps, the other extra things that you have asked them to do and they've don this to the best of their ability step by step by step. . . . I think perhaps I would be more willing to spend time with you than that person over there who just [doesn't participate].

Another instructor agreed: "Yeah, I think the interaction, one-on-one interaction is really valuable. But I think students also have a right to fail." Further concurrence followed by another instructor:

I took pride in all my years of experience of teaching both in public schools and in community college, taking the pride that I can motivate students to success. But now I guess over the years, you have to realize there comes a time that a student has the right to make that decision. And when they choose to make that decision and I've done everything I possibly can, then so be it.

She went on to describe how things have been "fixed" for students in high school so they could pass:

I think that's the thing about developmental students that we're getting. The word, *developmental*—some are developmental which means they have skills that can be developed nicely. . . but we are encountering students who are lacking tremendously in their skills, and their potential and ability is limited, therefore their skills will not—they will get to a point, and they will not be any higher. . . they are limited in their short-term memory. Any type of mentoring is still not going to solve the problem.

Overall, while the faculty group agreed that continuing the FI interaction was important, changes in the form and documentation should be considered. More importantly, they believed the FI interaction, while not perfect, helped them become more learner-centered because they felt a greater connection and bond especially with the students with whom they interacted. Interestingly, they described how this bond also extended to the other students with whom they did not interact in the FI setting. This is what they perceived as important in helping them become more learner-centered.

Summary

Through the FI interaction, students perceive themselves as being more confident in their learning process; they have learned to build trust in an otherwise sometimes harsh environment. These students are characterized as underprepared for college-level coursework, yet they describe a positive

understanding of themselves as learners. Their connections to their peers and faculty members are important focal points in their learning process. Through the FI interactions, students have been guided to trust in their instructors to be supportive and positive in building their self-image, in listening to not only their instructors' advice but equally important, have confidence in their personal judgment about their own learning strengths and weaknesses. They have learned to listen to their own voice when they feel that they do not understand the material and should seek further help.   This confidence sometimes transcends their other learning experiences and guides them to seek full advantage of the faculty and campus resources.

In addition, students expressed how important caring instructors were to their learning experiences. Most often, this feeling that instructors cared about the students was not always apparent until the students were asked to take part in the one-on-one FI interaction. Sometimes these students described their initial participation as reluctant, perhaps coupled with fear or anxiety, or with a feeling that this FI experience would be a waste of time or would not be useful. However, once students completed their experience, the opposite most often resulted: students described how it helped break down perceived and real barriers that kept them from reaching their potential.

Interestingly, while students placed a lot of importance on the connection between their instructor's personality (caring, willing to help outside of class), including the atmosphere created by the instructor, and their own learning,

faculty members were not as quick to acknowledge this. In their descriptions, faculty members often connected "responsibility for learning" with their own responsibility to foster adult development; they placed the learning responsibility almost 100 percent with the student. Faculty members feared they would create a "babying" atmosphere that did not lead to adult development. Although in their descriptions, students generally agreed that the responsibility for their learning is overwhelmingly their own or both student-instructor's responsibility, they felt they were treated more like adults, human beings, when they were shown concern and offered help from their instructors.

Contrary to what faculty members often described as worrisome, DS students, no matter their background, do not equate caring, encouragement, personal attention, and verbalization of high expectations with being "babied." According to students, faculty members displaying such characteristics helped foster in students a sense of commitment and ownership to learning that motivated them to do well. In addition, this study pointed out the importance to students of certain faculty traits that were valuable and appreciated because of students' perception of their positive impact on their learning.   Therefore, the overall value of the FI conference may not be from the faculty members' perspective but from the students'.

Finally, in regards to teaching, faculty members often incorporated what they learned into their teaching strategies, thus fostering a process to become more learner-centered and build a greater connectedness to their students.

Although faculty members found the FI conference documentation burdensome and not helpful to students, they did see that the main benefit was strengthening the connection with their students and their learning process. As faculty members learned more about their students' experiences of the program, especially the barriers and obstacles to their learning, bonds were strengthened as faculty members sought to alleviate those constraints for their students.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Community colleges have been and continue to be the main source for underprepared adults to access higher education and meet their occupational, career, and personal goals. Providing developmental education opportunities is an important component of the mission of community colleges in the US, and although currently under much scrutiny and funding controversy, this field is the link to not only providing students access to higher education but most importantly, increasing their success.

To continually improve on the positive outcomes developmental educators strive towards, they look for ways to provide more effective learning and teaching opportunities for those adults who today are mostly "non-traditional": they must address their own skill deficiencies in reading, writing, mathematics, and language; they often have additional familial priorities; and they often have at least part-time jobs. Addressing these diverse students and their challenges offers special opportunities for today's community college educators.

Discussion of Findings

In order to demonstrate to society their commitment to community college learners, educators use various assessment tools, both summative and formative, depending on the purpose of the assessment. In promoting improvement of student learning on the course level, formative assessment

Feedback Intervention (FI) interactions such as the one described in this study is one way faculty members can address such improvements. The findings in this study focused on how such interactions affected perceptions of Developmental Studies students' learning and faculty members' teaching experiences. The findings center around students as learners, faculty members as moving towards learner-centeredness, and the DS courses as bridging students' learning experiences.

<div align="center">Students as Learners</div>

I first described the students and their learning contexts and found that students saw themselves as positive and self-actuating in their learning experiences. Researchers call the body of research on students' beliefs about themselves "self-theories" and include studies on self-concept, beliefs about one's qualities, and self-efficacy, beliefs about one's ability to complete certain tasks. Tagg (2003) notes that from a student's perspective, "the purpose of college depends upon how they believe they can use college to achieve meaningful personal goals" (p.48). He also notes that there is broad agreement among researchers that students either adopt what Dweck (2000) calls "performance goals," where students seek positive judgments of their competence, or "learning goals," where students seeks to increase their competence (p. 15). Although these goals are not mutually exclusive, students tend to favor one over the other. Additionally, a study done by Kulik & Kulik (1991) connects students' self-concept improvements and their resulting

improved grade point averages to individual counseling sessions.   Casazza &

Silverman (1996) suggest that "integrating counseling sessions into academic

intervention programs" can be an important component in promoting students'

academic success. Since the FI interaction addressed students' performance

and learning goals while integrating one-on-one counseling-type interactions, it

is understandable that the students in this study understood themselves

positively as learners and that their perception of the FI interaction was one in

which it helped them develop as both individuals and as learners.

Students also expressed how connections, both with their peers and their

instructors, were very important to their learning process. Students described

how they perceived those connections to help foster bonds and trust that led to a

willingness to integrate others' (faculty members and peers) advice and

guidance into their learning. These connections were formed through the FI

interaction process which included both the invitation and the actual

conferences.

In their groundbreaking study on women's development, Belenky,

Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) describe a continuum from "silence" to

"constructed knowledge" as learners move through their thinking processes.

They suggest that the ideal process to address learners is through "connected

teaching," a teaching approach "in which the expert examines the needs and

capacities of the learner and composes a message that is . . . 'courteous' to the

learner" (p. 194). Casazza & Silverman (1996) describe this approach as one

that is "shared between student and teacher and that instruction should be carried out through 'public dialogue,' . . . . [ensuring] that students do not remain voiceless and that they are respected for both their own knowledge and their experiences" (p. 45). While Belenky, et al. (1986) conducted their study with women, the descriptions in this study by both men and women expressed the importance of them feeling respected and valued through the FI interaction. The FI interactions are perceived by Developmental Studies students to promote their success in the higher educational setting because they value connections in their learning environment. Because the FI involved out-of-class interactions with faculty members, students described they felt that their instructors cared about them not only as students but as individuals. They described the benefits of the FI interaction as motivating, nurturing, and promoting their learning.

Another finding of this study focused on the faculty characteristics that students suggested were important to their positive perception of the FI interaction. Davis (1999) discusses how encouragement of students to become self-motivated, independent learners depends on instructors who create an atmosphere that is "open and positive" and provides "frequent and positive feedback that supports students' beliefs that they can do well" (p. 193). While instructors are often able to achieve such a setting in the classroom, they have an additional tool through the out-of-class FI interaction that provides individual positive feedback and fosters student's positive self-perceptions. Descriptions of students in this study confirm such an environment in the FI interaction. They

describe feeling motivated and better equipped to make academic decisions that promote their learning.

These findings also concur with a study done by d'Apollonia and Abrami (1997) which succinctly describes three ways that instructors can best promote student achievement: delivering instruction, facilitating interactions, and evaluating student learning. While direct instruction was not usually feasible during the ten-minute FI conferences, it clearly facilitated faculty-student interactions that offered new opportunities for faculty members to communicate in a face-to-face setting their thoughts and concerns about the student's performance.

A study conducted by Kuh and Hu (2001) describes "substantive" faculty-student interaction with emphasis on knowledge acquisition and academic skill development as having a positive, direct impact on student learning. The FI conference was structured primarily to address specific course learning outcomes and metacognitive skills needed to improve the student's chances for success.   Students described their perceptions about improved learning not only in the developmental studies course, but also how their newly-acquired behaviors such as attending tutoring sessions and seeking additional help from their college-level course instructors were embedded and became a norm for them as learners.

Students in this study described the DS courses and faculty as helping to bridge earlier educational experiences such as high school to their current

experiences of college. Specifically, they described faculty members to be nurturing, supportive, and motivational. They also described positive modifications made in their learning strategies as a result of the FI conferences.

One important goal of the FI interaction is to help promote self-directed learning. Because classroom learning takes place in both group and individual settings, Brookfield (1986) notes that important differences must be considered when facilitating both settings, with the understanding that different learning styles and learning behaviors are employed in each setting.   With individual settings often being the more common in a typical classroom, facilitators can promote self-direction through individual counselings that can involve negotiating learning contracts and identifying student's learning styles, along with facilitating discussions of the student's strengths and weaknesses in regards to the learning outcomes.

Brookfield (1986) notes that when these discussions are "distinct" and individualized, made separate from the group setting, a greater self-direction by the student often results, fostered by "individual reflection and personal interaction with the facilitator" (p. 60); he further suggests the following: "Through developing such a sense of their uniqueness and of their ability to control aspects of the teaching-learning interaction, learners will find that their personal investment in, as well as their motivation for, learning is enhanced" (p. 61).

Additionally, the work of Knowles (1984) centers around a set of assumptions termed "andragogy" that focuses on adults and their learning. Key for adult learners is their experiences which are a "rich resource" for learning. Adults need to feel that their experiences are respected. Adult learners need to feel accepted and respected and that their opinions and experiences are listened to and valued. Adults need to feel that their experiences are important and relevant to their work and that the subjects they learn have an immediate relevance to their job or personal life.

These assumptions are confirmed by students in this study as they described their FI experience. Because the FI interaction had direct, immediate relevance to their life as students, they took the experience seriously and made efforts to apply what was discussed. The relevance was not necessarily to their world outside of college but to the real world as they experienced it, with their college experience playing a major role not only in time and money but also in what they had to live through in their day-to-day lives. As adults, students could not afford to separate their "student life" from their "real life" because the intersections influence both personal and work decisions.

In addition, many of the adult learning issues and characteristics described in the context of the participants in this study are congruent with those noted by Kasworm (2003a, 2003b), Kasworm & Marienau (1997), Brookfield (1986), and Knowles (1984). Furthermore, Kasworm (2003a) notes, "Even though adults have a significant historical and contemporary presence in

undergraduate higher education, there is limited knowledge of their unique learning differences in the undergraduate collegiate classroom" (p. 82). Kasworm (2005) also notes that a similar state for research on adult undergraduate student identity exists, with "extremely limited empirical research regarding adult student identity in a community college context" (p. 4). I would further suggest that even fewer studies focus on special populations within the community college that include developmental studies students. However, while this study did not specifically focus on the age, it does follow that the participants, being in a community college setting, have similar learning patterns as described within the adult education literature and thus confirm their perceptions and experiences described in this study.

<u>Faculty as Learner-Centered</u>

In their research, Huba and Freed (2000) discuss nine tenets of learner-centered assessment that "support the attributes of quality undergraduate education," of which two especially relate directly to this study: learner-centered assessment provides prompt feedback and depends on increased student-faculty contact. The FI interaction also strives to address indirectly the other tenets: learner-centered assessment promotes high expectations, enhances the early years of study, respects diverse talents and learning styles, actively involves students in learning, and fosters collaboration (p. 22-24). Faculty members in this study discussed the importance of guiding and coaching

students through the learning process, focusing not only on addressing specific course learning outcomes but also the affective skills.

Moreover, faculty members described a focus on a more learner-centered approach as a result of FI interactions with their students. This approach included a greater awareness of students' varying learning styles and using strategies that more effectively addressed their students' needs. These resulting actions helped foster success for students who may otherwise not have continued with their educational goals.

One important finding expressed by faculty members is their dilemma of providing support while promoting student independence and personal responsibility. While the work of Svinicki (1991) generally focuses on how organization promotes learning, she also proposes that organized instruction promotes students' understanding and learning of the content by instructors modeling the organizational patterns and structures needed for such understanding. She argues that students are more likely to learn and understand the material because they are using similar organizational approaches to those used by the instructor. By using such an approach, faculty members provide support while fostering independence in students' learning decisions and activities.

In addition, it is important to note that while faculty members discussed the tension they felt between being caring and nurturing while at the same time fostering independence. They did not want to "baby" their students but still

wanted to offer support and guidance. However, students always discussed the support they received from their instructors as positive and empowering, not in any negative or debilitating contexts.

Another goal of the FI interaction is to help students become more independent and confident in their learning by modeling the organizational behaviors that promote these outcomes. For example, when faculty members discuss the approaches to take when studying for an upcoming test, they don't just talk about what students should do; they show the students using artifacts like flash cards and learning devices such as the Franklin speller. Their classroom assessment practices then follow up by including collaborative exercises that incorporate flash cards and spellers. Students also took actions such as connecting to other institutional resources (tutoring, LRC labs) and creating time management calendars; thus, faculty members saw the demonstrated value of the FI interaction.

<div align="center">The Developmental Studies Bridge</div>

Most importantly, while this study did not focus on departmental level assessment practices, the students in this study confirmed how important the Developmental Studies program and their faculty members were in their learning experiences. When discussing those experiences, they often brought up the differences between developmental studies and college-level courses and faculty members. The students described their appreciation of the "bridge" the courses offered to help close the gap between their learning deficiencies and

their learning goals. The bridge extended to more than cognitive mastering of learning outcomes; it also addressed the affective domain that included nurturing, caring, comfort, trust, and motivation that was expressed by students as being equally important.

These findings concur with the literature on the importance of Developmental Studies coursework to serve in a refresher and remediation capacity that addresses students' academic adjustment and persistence, thus promoting increasing success rates (DesJardins, Kim, & Rzonca, C., 2002-2003; Hoyt, 1999; Higbee, Arendale, & Lundell, 2005). However, as in all aspects of a student's educational experience, one cannot focus only on students' academic skills, separating those from the other aspects in their lives that directly or indirectly affect their success. Educators must look at students holistically to include not only objective assessments, such as their test scores and grades, but also the affective assessments, such as their confidence and motivation. This study's findings illuminate another more integral aspect of the DS function in addition to the academic help when the course includes the FI interaction: it facilitates a caring and nurturing relationship that helps foster students' self-confidence and motivation needed to carry them beyond the DS course through their other courses and academic experiences.

Implications for Theory and Practice

According to Casazza & Silverman (1996), college student development theory combines ideas from a number of cognitive theorists: Erikson, Piaget, Perry, Kohlberg, and Chickering (Perry and Chickering are discussed in Chapter III). Human behavior is based on differences among individuals, environments, and the interaction between the two. The tenets of student development include individualism which includes the belief that no two persons are exactly alike and learning is best promoted when considering each student's unique combination of strengths and weaknesses when providing guidance and feedback.

Another model of adult development most closely relevant to the FI interaction focuses on the importance of relationships. While most of the studies in relational models focus on women's development, identity development, and sources of well-being, the central metaphor to all is the "ever-changing web of interconnectedness." In addition, "the deepest sense of one's being is continuously formed in connection to others and is inextricably tied to relational formation," with *empathy* being of central importance (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 110-111). Furthermore, Caffarella (1996) discusses the importance of communication that sets "a climate of mutual respect, trust, honesty, and openness" in fostering productive connections allowing for positive learning settings (p. 42).

The FI interaction supports both theories.   First, with respect to individualism, each student is considered individually, and the students

themselves appreciate the personalized attention by faculty members to their special circumstances and skill set. Students understand that written feedback on quizzes and other assignments addresses their particular learning needs. The fact that faculty members provide one-on-one attention is indeed valued by students as caring, nurturing, and motivational. Second, with respect to relational models, faculty members are encouraged to remain positive during their conferences, where an empathic environment is fostered through mutual respect. Faculty members described how they felt they got the chance to know their students better while students had the opportunity to "humanize" their instructors when students experienced not only minor aspects of their instructor's lives such as personal pictures and "bragging wall" of accomplishments but more importantly the time and effort they had expended to show they cared.

As community colleges experience increased pressure to document their institutional, departmental, and course outcomes, assessment data become crucial. The shift from access to success is the basis of continued growth in funding developmental education programs. Stakeholders are not only interested in how many students are enrolling at institutions, more importantly they want to know how many students are successfully meeting other endpoints such as transfer to 4-year institutions and certificate/degree completions. Moreover, success includes data on the number of students employed within six months to one year of completion.

Educators must continuously consider the most effective strategies and methodologies to address the diverse community of students coming to our institutions with needs that cannot be addressed in a one-size-fits-all fashion. Faculty members must individualize students' educational experiences as much as possible. For example, when faculty members employ the classroom assessment practice "Muddiest Point" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 120), they ask all students in the last minutes of class to write on an index card something that they did not understand. The faculty member gathers the information and then addresses those questions at the beginning of the next class period. Thus, while students are not purposefully addressed individually, their unique questions and misunderstandings are considered. In that sense, their individual needs as they relate to course learning outcomes are indeed addressed. While most classroom assessment practices address the learning outcomes of all students, the FI interaction is able to focus individualized attention to additional dimensions that foster learning: communication, analysis and problem solving, and social interaction.

Baxter Magolda (1992) argues that the relational approach, or "connectedness," is key to effective learning for most students, no matter what their learning patterns. She notes that connection can be achieved

through validating students' contributions to learning, situating learning

in students' own experiences, and defining learning as joint construction

of meaning. These principles, by their nature, entail connecting with

students from various ways of knowing, within different gender-related

patterns, and with a variety of learning needs and preferences. . . . They

underlie knowledge construction, and in the process teach students how

to develop their own distinctive voice . . . . that reflects the ability to

evaluate knowledge critically, analyze complex situations, assess biased

perspectives, and make wise choices. (p. 391)

Assessment practices such as FI interactions are the beginnings of promoting

such connections. The goal of higher education is to promote such higher-level

critical thinking in our students; faculty members should consider other

innovative "connected" practices they can include in their classrooms.

Yet, the data on adoption of innovation in higher education is

disappointing, according to a national survey conducted by the National Center

for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI). "Perhaps the most disappointing

finding was that institutions reported they are not using student-assessment data

very extensively in academic decision-making and they believe this information

has little or no impact on institutional performance" (NCPI, 1999, as cited in

Tagg, 2003, p. 10).   Tagg notes a real disconnect between what administrators

say and what actually happens to students at their institutions. Terry O'Banion

(1997), founding president of the League for Innovation in the Community

College, noted, "Innovations that fail to change the fundamental processes of

institutions amount to little more than 'trimming the branches of a dying tree'"

(p. 1). Tagg (2003) challenges institutions to address innovation through a shift

from an instruction paradigm to a learning paradigm with the following

characteristics:

> 1) the college should support students in pursuing their own goals; 2) the
>
> college should require frequent meaningful student performances; 3) the
>
> college should provide frequent and ongoing feedback; 4) the college
>
> should assure a long time horizon for learning; and 5) the college should
>
> provide for stable communities of practice. (p. 124)

Tagg argues that through fostering student ownership and responsibility, faculty members can help students find intrinsically rewarding goals that connect students to their interests. They should promote activities for students that are "visible and meaningful to others" (p. 155). Such performances should be frequent, continual, and connected to their learning outcomes. Faculty members should understand and apply the difference between feedback, "information that illustrates the effect of a performance in light of some standard or goal . . . used to improve future performances," and evaluation, "information that states or confirms a judgment on a performance or a person" (p. 185). Faculty members should help students see the big picture not only with extrinsic short-term goals but also intrinsic long-term goals. Finally, Tagg argues that "purposeful communities of practice" involve creating such settings for students and promoting collaboration among faculty members (p. 252).

In focusing on the feedback characteristic, the key is redefining feedback in such as way that truly promotes positive change through embracing the

following tenets: the more specific the feedback, the more effective it is; praise should be directed at the performance rather than the person; reasonable timeframes must be considered when providing feedback; feedback should involve a conversation between the learner and coach; feedback should be interactive (Tagg, 2003, p. 186). These tenets are important when considering the effectiveness of any feedback intervention such as the FI conference described in this study. Community college faculty can contribute their experiences and expertise toward building such a learning paradigm in their institutions.

The FI intervention is beneficial for students; however, it is realistically only feasible in addressing a small percentage of students. Faculty members expressed their concerns about the extra time and efforts in addressing even only those most at risk of not passing their course, usually less than 20 percent of their students. While this assessment activity is not designed to address all students in a classroom, a number of equally valuable Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) such as the ones described by Angelo & Cross (1993) can be used by faculty members to address all their students. Coupled with FI interaction conferences, these techniques will certainly improve the quality of learning and teaching in today's diverse classrooms.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on underprepared students placed in the

Developmental Studies Program at Central Texas College. The formative

assessment FI conference was used to help address students' individual

challenges in providing guidance and promoting their success in the DS course

and as college students. This study addressed the first stage of assessing the

effectiveness of FI: understanding students' experience and perspectives in

regards to this intervention. However, the next step would involve quantitatively

tracking the number of students involved in this interaction who completed and

passed the DS course in which they were enrolled. Further research can also

include tracking the success of students in subsequent semesters, including

consideration of additional DS and college-level coursework. Both projects

should acknowledge the wide range of variables involved.

Second, while the greatest need at this point focuses on students who are

least prepared for college-level work, students who test out or otherwise skip the

Developmental Studies Program and are taking college-level courses should

also be offered the FI interaction experience. While students in such courses

may not be as underprepared as their DS counterparts, there are still those who

struggle and face obstacles that impede their learning. Being motivated and

supported are not mutually exclusive to DS students. Especially when

considering student development theory, it seems possible that all students can

benefit from interactions that personalize out-of-class focus on their unique needs and skill sets.

Third, this study focused specifically on one case: Central Texas College. Because of this college's distinct mission, structure, and student population, I would suggest that researchers replicate this study at other community colleges in order to find out whether the perceptions are indeed similar. The guiding question would be whether the students and their learning experiences at CTC are unique, or do students' learning experiences transcend physical campuses and constructs.

Finally, as faculty members are an integral part of the feedback and assessment process, researchers may focus on finding which institutional processes and practices best promote improved and extended faculty-student interactions in all courses, not just within the Developmental Studies program. While assessment is often an automatic function that faculty members embrace everyday in their classrooms, they should be encouraged to further engage in collaboration with students and among other faculty members.

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) describe the policies, programs, and practices of strong-performing colleges and universities participating in the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project. The researchers define "strong-performing" as higher-than-predicted graduation rates and better-than-predicted student engagement scores on the National

Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).   They note that the institutions involved
in this project believe and facilitate the following:

> substantive, educationally meaningful, student-faculty interaction just
> doesn't happen; it is expected, nurtured, and supported. . . . Faculty
> members who forge authentic relationships with students often are able
> to connect with students at deeper levels and challenge them to
> previously unrealized levels of achievement and personal performance.
> (pp. 280-1)

Faculty members at the community college level should seek support from their
institutions to build programs that focus on substantive faculty-student
interactions and qualitatively and quantitatively document their experiences and
outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What has your experience of developmental studies courses been like for you? If you are taking (or have taken) regular college courses, who are developmental courses different from these?

2. Describe your past learning experiences. Tell me about a time when you remember the "light bulb going off in your head."   Tell me about a time when you felt particularly frustrated.

3. Compare those past experiences to your present learning experiences. Are there any differences? If so, what do you think accounts for this?

4. Describe your "feedback intervention" experience in your developmental studies course. Tell me about your feelings and thoughts before the appointment time. Tell me about your feelings and thoughts after the experiences. How important was the expectation of your commitment to action? How feasible was the intervention?

5. How has your FI experience affected your learning.   Do you look at learning differently?

6. How is this FI experience different from past discussions with instructors about your learning?

7. What actions (tutoring, computer lab work, supplemental instruction, etc.) did you take as a result of the FI experience? How would you rate the value of that action in terms of your learning?

8. How important are your relationships with your instructor and your fellow

   students in your learning experience? What affects those relationships?

9. How has this FI experience affected the way you look at college? your

   learning? yourself?

APPENDIX B

FACULTY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is your understanding of the purpose of the FI?

2. Describe how you approached this intervention. Include any feelings you had when preparing for the FI. How feasible was the intervention?

3. Tell me about the actual experience of the intervention. How important do you think was the student's commitment to action? Did you discuss students' educational background, study habits, or anything outside of the Conference Form?

4. How do you believe the intervention has affected your students' learning experience in your class?

5. How do you believe the intervention has affected your teaching and attitude towards your students.

6. How important is your relationship with your students in their learning experience? In your teaching experience?

7. Tell me how you believe your students reacted to the FI experience.

8. What actions did your students take as a result of the FI? Do you believe those actions improved their learning?

9. After the first interview, did you think you understood your students better? Did you approach those students differently?

APPENDIX C

QEP STUDENT SURVEY

Dear student,
In an effort to improve teaching and learning at CTC, we are conducting this survey. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability based on your own experience. Please feel free to use the back of page 3 or another blank sheet of paper if you need extra space for your responses. Your responses will remain anonymous.

1. I am a
    _____ freshman (1-30 hours completed)
    _____ sophomore (31-60 hours completed)
    _____ other (more than 60 hours completed)

2. I am going to CTC
    _____ full-time (12 or more hours)
    _____ part-time (less than 12 hours)

3. I have _____ semester hours completed at CTC.
    I have _____ semester hours completed at another college or university.

4. I am _____ years old.

5. I am *(check all that apply)*
    _____single
    _____married (number of children living with you_____)
    _____living with roommate(s)
    _____living with parents
    _____living in dorm
    _____divorced (no children)
    _____divorced (number of children living with you_____)
    _____military spouse   Spouse in Iraq? _____yes   _____no

6. I consider my nationality/ethnic origin to be *(check all that apply)*
    _____ Caucasian
    _____ Hispanic
    _____ African-American
    _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
    _____ Other

7. I am currently enrolled in the following courses: *(check all that apply)*
    _____ Developmental Studies Reading
    _____ Developmental Studies Writing
    _____ Developmental Studies Mathematics

8. I have taken or am currently taking college-credit (regular) classes at CTC.
    _____yes   _____no
    If yes, which college credit classes have you taken or are currently taking? *(check all that apply)*
    _____English
    _____Mathematics
    _____Science
    _____Nursing
    _____Government
    _____Psychology/Sociology
    _____History
    _____Business
    _____Criminal Justice
    _____Computer Science

The next set of questions is about the out-of-class conference (meeting) that your Developmental Studies instructor asked you to attend.

9.   I have participated in an out-of-class conference (meeting) with my <u>Developmental Studies instructor</u>.
      _____yes _____no   *(if <u>no</u>, skip to question #18, page 2)*

10.   What did your Developmental Studies instructor discuss with you? *(check all that you recall)*
      ____test grades
      ____homework grades
      ____quiz grades
      ____computer lab (*My Writing Lab, My Reading Lab, My Math Lab*)
      ____your strengths and weaknesses in the subject area
      ____absences
      ____tardies
      ____participating during class
      ____disciplinary issues
      ____tutoring (Project PASS)
      ____workshops: _____Test Anxiety _____Notetaking _____Time Management _____Testing
      _____Research Papers
      ____personal issues : _____childcare _____transportation _____college costs _____relationships
      ____Other *(be specific)*
      _____

11.   Using your own words, describe as best you can **how you felt** when your Developmental Studies instructor asked you to meet   with him/her for this conference (meeting):
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____

12.   Did you feel the same way **after** the conference (meeting)?   _____ yes   no_____   *Why or why not?*
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____

13.   Do you believe the conference (meeting) was **helpful**?   _____yes   no_____

      On a scale of 1-5, rate **how helpful** the conference (meeting) was for you: *(check one)*

      _____1   _____2   _____3   _____4   _____5
      (not helpful at all)   (neutral)   (extremely helpful)

14.   Using your own words, explain <u>why</u> the conference (meeting) was **helpful** or **not helpful**:
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____

15.   Using your own words, explain what the Developmental Studies instructor could have done to make the conference (meeting)   **better or more effective**.
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____

16.   Using your own words, explain what **actions** you are taking or **changes** you are making as a result of the conference
          (meeting)?
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____

17.	Would you have gone to see your Developmental Studies instructor on your own **without** your instructor asking you to meet? 		_____yes		no_____		*Why or why not?*
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

18.	In any of your other current or past *non-Developmental Studies* classes at college, have you ever met with an instructor 		out-of-class on your own **without** the instructor asking you to meet*?* _____yes		no_____
Why or why not?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

19.	Using your own words, describe as best you can what you think most affects **your own ability to learn**:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

20.	Who do you believe is responsible for **your learning**? *(check one)*
	_____I am			_____my instructor is			_____we both are

21.	In a class where you received your **best grade**, describe in your own words what your instructor did to help you.
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**This survey is complete. Please give the entire completed survey to your instructor
BY THURSDAY, MAY 10.**

APPENDIX D

QEP FEEDBACK INTERVENTION (FI)

ANONYMOUS FACULTY SURVEY

In order to assess the effectiveness of our QEP intervention, we are asking that you complete the following anonymous survey. Your responses will be extremely helpful in any decisions to modify our current intervention.

Background of QEP Conferences: In order to improve student learning, CTC's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) calls for each department to customize an intervention that it believes will have an impact on student learning and success. Based on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and its companion Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) with a total of over 440,000 student responses, the findings clearly suggest that students who participate in collaborative learning and educational activities outside the classroom and who interact more with faculty members get better grades, are more satisfied with their education, and are more likely to remain in college.
In addition, the gains from those practices are even greater for students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds, or who come to college less prepared than their peers (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, Wasley, November 17, 2006, p. A39). Finally, over one-quarter of community college students report never having received academic advice, and over 40 percent of adjunct faculty report never giving academic advice (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, Ashburn, December 1, 2006, p. A1).

Description and Purpose of QEP Conferences: The QEP conference is a mandated, out-of-class interaction that focuses on academic advising for students at greatest risk. Faculty members discuss strength(s) and weakness(es) with those students, ask students to commit to an action to address weakness(es), discuss campus and other resources, and focus on empowering students to take ownership of their learning. Because of the challenges many community college students face, most would not participate in such an intervention unless it were mandatory.

Please answer the questions below based on the above information and your own personal beliefs and experiences. If more room is needed to answer any question, you may use the back of these pages.

1. **Do you believe students are different today than when you were a student?**
        Yes_____ No _____ *Why or why not?*

How are students today different or the same as when you were a student?

2. **Using the following scale of 1-5, rate the following statements to the best of your understanding by placing an "X" in the appropriate line:**

   a. **It is more difficult to be a student today than when I was a student.**

   1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
   strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

b. Most students who just graduated from high school are not prepared for my course.

1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

c. I generally use the same methodologies and strategies in teaching my courses today as I did when I first began teaching.

1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

d. My students see me outside of classtime *without my request* when they have academic problems.

1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

e. It is important to me to show that I care for my students.

1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

f. My own collegiate experience would be classified today as *non-traditional.*

1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

g. I had little or no academic help in my own collegiate experience.

1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

h. I have little or no impact on my students' choices about learning and success.

1_____   2_____   3_____   4_____   5_____
strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

3. Have you participated in the QEP Conferences?   Yes_____   No_____   *Why or why not?*

4. Do you believe the QEP Conferences will have a positive impact on the learning and success of those students who participate?   Yes____   No____   *Why or why not?*
The following questions pertain to those who have participated in the QEP Conferences. If you have <u>not</u> participated, this survey is complete. Please refer to the end of this survey on page 4 for submission instructions.

1. What topics have you generally covered during session(s) with your students?   Please be specific and include both academic and other issues (if applicable).

2. Do you believe it is within your purview as a faculty member to engage with your students *outside* of class time? Yes_____ No_____ *Why or why not?*

3. Do you believe it is important to use the QEP Conference Form to document the sessions? Yes_____ No _____ *Why or why not?*

4. Has participating in these sessions changed your teaching strategies and/or methodologies? Yes_____ No _____ *If yes, how so?*

5. Has participating in these sessions changed your teaching philosophy?
Yes_____ No _____ *If yes, how so?*

6. Has participating in these sessions changed your attitude or feelings about teaching?
Yes_____ No _____ *If yes, how so?*

7. Has participating in these sessions changed your attitude or feelings about students?
Yes_____ No _____ *If yes, how so?*

8. Has participating in these sessions changed your attitude about student learning?
Yes_____ No _____ *If yes, how so?*

9. Do you believe the QEP Conference Form or process should be changed?
Yes_____ No_____ *If yes, how so?*

<u>SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:</u>
Please place the completed survey in the attached envelope and submit the envelope to the Departmental Assistant (Building 118, room 1).

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX E

CENTRAL TEXAS COLLEGE

STUDENT/FACULTY FEEDBACK INTERVENTION (FI)

CONFERENCE FORM

Student's Name:_____   Date of Conference:_____   ☐
         Initial

Professor's Name:_____   Course Name/Section:_____   ☐
         Follow-up

Section I:
    1. Explain purpose of conference to student **(to improve student learning through enhanced student-professor interaction and specific, individualized feedback)**
    2. Discuss student's areas of strength and/or talent (through observations, quizzes, interactions with other students and professor, tests, projects, etc.):

        a.
        b.
        c.

    3. Discuss student's areas of weakness and recommended improvement(s):

        a.
        b.
        c.

Section II:
    4. Discuss recommended student action(s) to address Number 3 above (tutor, Project Pass, computer lab, meetings with professor, etc.):

    5. Discuss commitment by student to address action(s) from Number 4 above (include deadlines and due dates, if applicable):

_____   _____
Signature of Student   Date   Signature of Professor   Date

(tear off bottom for student)

Actions for Improvement

Student's
Name:_____Date:_____
Course/Section:_____   Spring 2006

I have agreed to the following **actions for improvement** based on collaboration and discussion with my professor: (briefly note the areas of weakness on back of this tear-off portion)

    1.
    2.
    3.

My main goal for this class is as follows:

VITA

Suzanne Morales-Vale
Central Texas College
Department of Developmental Studies
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Killeen, TX 76540
suzanne.morales-vale@ctcd.edu

Education:

Year/ Degree	Major	Institution
2008/ Ph.D.	Educational Human Resource Development	Texas A&M University, College Station
1993/ M.Ed.	English	Texas State University, San Marcos
1990/ B.A.	German	California State University, Sacramento
1986/ B.A.	English	Texas State University, San Marcos

Academic Appointments:

1993-present	Professor, Developmental Studies	Central Texas College
1992	Adjunct Instructor	Texas State University, San Marcos
1989-1990	Adjunct Instructor	Central Texas College Flensburg, Germany
1987-1988	English Instructor	Palm Desert High School California

Professional Certificate

Texas Educator Certificate (Life)   English/German (gr. 6-12)

Current Professional Organization Memberships:

Since	Association
1993	Texas Community College Teachers Association
1995	National Association for Developmental Education
1996	College Reading and Learning Association
2000	National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development