In their voices, with their words: a case study of student success in accelerated developmental writing courses

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IN THEIR VOICES, WITH THEIR WORDS:
A CASE STUDY OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN ACCELERATED
DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING COURSES

by

Shawnda L. Floyd

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
March 4, 2016

Dissertation Chair: Margaret McMenamin, Ph.D.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daughters. May you be courageous enough to dream beyond your wildest imagination and bold enough to walk each dream out with purpose and conviction.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Margaret McMenamin for her guidance and advice throughout the dissertation process. I will forever be grateful for your encouragement and support. To Dr. Kerrigan, words cannot express how much I have learned from you. Many thanks for pushing me to do my best work. To Dr. Carl Calendar, thank you for being a mentor, supporter, and dear friend.

Finally to the loves of my life, my husband Rodney and daughters, Reaia, Shemaiah, and Gem, thank you for loving me and supporting me through it all. For knowing when to be silent, when to make me laugh, and when to make me leave the computer and simply love on you.
Abstract

Shawnda L. Floyd
IN THEIR VOICES, WITH THEIR WORDS:
A CASE STUDY OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN ACCELERATED
DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING COURSES
2015-2016
Margaret McMenamin, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

This study uses qualitative research to give voice to students in accelerated
developmental writing courses. Using a review of survey data and structured interviews,
students were asked about their lived experience in accelerated developmental writing
courses. Four cases of students were studied from two different community college
settings. Particular attention was given to capturing the students’ voices in answering
why the students believed they were successful in these courses.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

McCabe (2000) reports that as many as four-fifths of high school graduates need some form of postsecondary education to prepare them to live an economically self-sufficient life and to deal with the increasingly complex social, political, and culture issues they will face. Despite this fact, if the current trends continue in higher education, there will be a shortfall of 14 million college-educated working adults by 2020 (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). Interestingly enough, this shortfall is not due to a lack of interest in pursuing a higher education. As early as 1997, 97% of students completing high school indicated that they planned to attend college, and, out of that number, 71% aspired to earn a bachelor’s degree (Choy, 1999). Today’s population of students also makes up a diverse group encompassing women and people of color.

Since there is no lack of interest in going to college and there is a broad population of students who desire a degree, why is there a threat to the number of college-educated people able to enter the workforce? There are different reasons offered in response to this question, however, I will offer two for more specific discussion, as it relates to the research study.

For one, high school preparation is lacking. The reality is as a nation we have two separate systems, K12 and college. Through the years, neither system has given much thought to the other. In fact, only five states have fully aligned high school academic standards with the demands of colleges and employers (Achieve, 2006). And alignment only represents one component of the K12/college systems discussion.

The other critical point is the lack of preparation for each student. Just over half
(51%) of high school graduates have the reading skills they need to succeed in college (American College Testing Program [ACT], 2006). Another layer that complicates the issue of academic preparation is the issue of diversity. While the student population continues to expand in terms of socioeconomic and ethnic/racial diversity, support for the known skills deficit in these groups is slight if in existence at all. The enrollment and persistence rates of low-income students, African American, Latino, Native Americans, and students with disabilities continue to lag behind White and Asian groups (Gonzales, 1996; Swail, 2003).

For community colleges these points become significant because they are open access institutions. Community colleges accept everyone who seeks admittance. In addition, community colleges are traditionally priced well below their four-year counterparts. These factors combined make community college a likely and smart choice for the student who has done little educational planning or who has lacked structured guidance toward a collegiate path (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). As can be expected, many of these students land in the developmental education population once enrolled in community college.

Developmental education has reported poor outcomes for years (Bailey et al., 2010), but there is a lack of data on the effectiveness of specific instructional approaches for this population (H. M. Levin & Calcagno, 2008). Finding effective ways of preparing low-skilled students for postsecondary coursework has important implications for the future of community colleges. For instance, in a discussion of developmental education, Cohen and Brawer (2008) have stated that: “The overriding issue is whether community colleges can maintain their credibility as institutions of higher education even while they enroll increasingly less well-prepared students” (p. 281).
Statement of the Problem

There is no doubt that developmental education is one of the most challenging issues facing community colleges (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). In an effort to bring developmental students up to the level of skill needed for college-level courses while acknowledging their differing levels of academic preparation, postsecondary institutions often offer a range of developmental courses in reading, writing, and mathematics designed to bridge this gap. Research from the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that more than one third of all first-year students in colleges today are taking some form of remedial coursework (Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2004). However, this figure can be as high as 6 out of 10 students at community colleges (Bettinger & Long, 2009).

While the cost of developmental education is expensive, some estimates state the cost being at over a billion dollars a year at public colleges (Breneman & Haarlow, 1998). From a strict business model, it would seem prudent to ignore the need for developmental education or at least mitigate costs in favor of decreasing the bottom line. Unfortunately, this decision would also result in negative social consequences that might include: increased poverty levels nationally, decreased numbers of skilled workers, and increased funding for social programs (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2008; Bettinger & Long, 2007).

In fact, President Obama’s Race to the Top initiative focuses on increasing the educational level of the American citizen thereby producing a more skilled worker (Killough, 2009). The underlying rationale is that the more skilled worker would have a greater opportunity of being gainfully employed (Moltz, 2010). Thus, making developmental education efforts successful is not only the goal of community college, but it is a core objective for our country.
The Perceived Panacea

There is so much buzz in the academic world about accelerated programs. The increased emphasis on student completion and decreased availability of students’ time, has altered college scheduling across the country. A little slower at keeping pace with proprietary institutions, public institutions of higher education are finally actively engaged in compressing course sequences from the traditional 15 week term to 8, 6 and even 4 week terms. While not entirely new to higher education, the resurgence of acceleration has offered students more options, with the developmental student being perhaps capable of the most benefits.

For the developmental student acceleration makes sense. Testing into basic skills puts the developmental student behind from the point of entry. Any acceleration in the developmental student’s course sequence has the potential to place the student where he should have been, if he were, in fact, college-ready upon graduation from high school. From this perspective, acceleration appears to offer the best of both worlds. It allows a less-than-college-ready student to be at college level by the close of the first term, and, therefore to be “on track” to continue college and graduate on time. In addition, the same student will be developed in the accelerated setting, addressing deficiencies in the amount of learning achieved to date.

Despite the amount of interest in acceleration for developmental education and the numerous programs proclaiming acceleration success across the nation, very little assessment has been conducted on these programs. The repeated message is that “acceleration works,” “just do it,” “add an accelerated program today and improve your developmental education numbers.” However, there is little to no information that
describes the student in an accelerated program for developmental education. What do they look like? Where do they come from? What is their prior school performance? Why does acceleration work for these students?

While I think accelerated programs can offer an alternative form of instruction that might be beneficial to students, it is unclear, whether or not the program really benefits the type of students that need help most—this being the disenfranchised students from historically disadvantaged populations and the lowest level-achieving students. I conducted research that provides more pertinent demographic data while delineating the characteristics of success for these students. The research in this study provides a more accurate picture for why these programs achieve success and for whom.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study demystifies accelerated programs in developmental writing, by taking a closer look at the programs and their students. It seems the literature and the schools that seek to implement these programs view developmental students as homogenous. This is far from true. Developmental students run the spectrum in academic abilities, socio-economic background, and ethnicity. Through a qualitative case study analysis, I probed in more depth, the student populations and two accelerated developmental writing programs to determine a possible recipe for success. Discovering what worked for these students provides guidance, from the students’ perspectives about what they believe worked for them.

The purpose of this research study was to determine the potential effectiveness of accelerated writing programs for students in developmental writing courses. In addition to identifying the traits or characteristics that contribute to student success in such
programs, particular attention was be given to socioeconomic and ethnicity/racial background of each student, to determine what affect, if any, that these criteria have on the student’s success. The literature already suggests that black students are more likely to enroll in developmental coursework when compared with white students with the same academic skills, preparation, and social background (Attewell, et al., 2006). But what makes a student complete an accelerated developmental writing course successfully?

The purpose of this study was to find the answer to that question.

**Research Questions**

The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

1. How does the accelerated developmental writing courses promote or achieve student success?
2. What are the central components of accelerated developmental writing courses that contribute to student success?
3. What traits does the student possess that aids their success in accelerated developmental writing courses?
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This literature review outlines the history of student success in developmental education at community colleges. A brief history of the evolution of student success and developmental education will be provided before establishing a firm definition for developmental education for the purpose of this study. Through the introduction of a deficit framework, the literature review seeks to create a lens or parameters for which to frame the research and analyze the retrieved data. The literature review concludes with a discussion of change. Central to this discussion is establishing the need and urgency for the study. The literature review ends with a general overview of the research study.

Shifting the Focus to Student Success

Over the past ten years, as the community college focus has shifted from access to success, developmental education has garnered increased scrutiny (Venezia & Hughes, 2013). Scholars have recognized this shift, but argued for a need for clarity in relation to the issue being scrutinized (2013). Developmental education is just one vehicle that is used to improve student success (Jez & Venezia, 2009). There are other options or models that might be adopted to achieve student success and adequate college preparation. Yet, it seems that academics in K12 and higher education view developmental education as the likely link to connect the gap between high school achievement and college readiness.

Developmental education includes college systems and processes in addition to course-work (Jes & Venezia, 2009). For example, improvements to advisement, assessment, placement, and course effectiveness would cultivate a better atmosphere to
produce greater student achievement in developmental courses (Jes & Hughes, 2009). Contemporary research highlights the importance of distinct and defined pathways to guide students through the labyrinth of college, and, while the pathways are evolving in higher education, they are by no means uniform (Bahr, 2013). Most pathway programs tend to involve the student making a career path or program choice early in their educational process (Complete College America, 2009). The hope is simply that the student has a road map to follow from the point of college entry to completion of certificate program or graduation (Bahr, 2013). While the pathway outlines the courses germane to the career path, it rarely outlines a developmental component, despite the fact that most college students will need to complete at least one developmental course.

The focus of this study is on developmental education programs and not the college process. Student success will be viewed through the lens of accelerated programs in developmental writing. Do students believe accelerated developmental writing programs contribute to their success in college? What characteristics of accelerated developmental writing programs promote persistence and success in the eyes of students? Are there areas of accelerated developmental writing programs that students believe should be refined or improved? Are there components to the accelerated developmental writing programs that students believe inhibit or thwart their success?

**Developmental Education Defined**

Before engaging in an analysis of the effectiveness of accelerated writing programs in developmental education, it is important to consider the whole of developmental education. Developmental education has been defined in many different ways (Brothen & Wambach, 2012). Very generally speaking, developmental education is
a term that covers programs and services designed for underprepared college students (Payne & Lyman, 1996). Typically, the category of underprepared college students includes the vast majority of students unable to read at a college level, unable to write standard academic English, and unable to compute algebra problems upon entry to college (Brothen & Wambach, 2012). Normally excluded from this pool are the English as Second Language (ESL) learners (Payne & Lyman, 1996). The focus of developmental education is not just basic skills. It is a body of study that promotes skills development in native learners rather than acclimation and acculturation of skills by non-native speakers.

While often interchanged with the term basic skills, developmental education remains distinct as it seeks to cultivate skills development rather than cure deficit learning (Cross, 1976). Many students in need of developmental education find that despite having a high school diploma, they will need one if not more semesters of skills development and application before being able to matriculate into a college course (Deil-Amen, 2011). As one might expect, this is a source of frustration for students, and students are not the only ones frustrated. Faculty members are increasingly more overwhelmed by the academic challenges presented in a singular classroom environment due to the broad divide in skills acquisition and development in a given classroom population (Darby, 1996).

Moreover, this paper seeks to clarify student success in accelerated developmental education. Dependent upon policy makers, accreditation practices, and community stakeholders, the focus and requirements of each program are potentially very different. For example, the institution’s approach, values, goals, and constituency might advance
certain objectives of accelerated developmental education while abandoning others entirely (Higbee & Dwinell, 1996). Is the role of one or both of these programs to cause the student to grow, develop, and evolve as a thinker? Or is it to remedy or correct bad learning habits (Higbee & Dwinell, 1996)? If a college promotes one perspective over the other, the result is very different curriculum strategies, assessment practices, and course objectives. Thus, the approach to teaching developmental education accelerated or otherwise, varies as much from classroom to classroom as it does from state to state nationally.

**The Effects of Ethnicity, Race, & Economics**

Deficit thinking renders the student’s background knowledge and experiences as irrelevant or, worse, as risk factors (Dudley-Marling, 2012). Deficit thinking involves a marginalized or negative viewpoint with regard to a person, practice, or situation. Dudley-Marling (2012) discussed the consequences of deficit gaze in the context of economically disadvantaged students and minority populations. In 2012, Dudley-Marling concluded that deficit thinking or deficit-learning theory promotes decontextualized skills learning that tends to assign categories of skills to varying segments of the population.

Minority or low-income students are almost always labeled as a group of people who need more instruction in de-contextualized skills and sub-skills in an effort to learn the right skills (Dudley-Marling, 2012). This presupposes that if they had learned the right skills and had more adequate experiences, they would not be in the population that needs skills development. Dudley-Marling maintained that this response creates more intensified learning mechanisms and strategies that mean more drills and more
schoolwork. Studies show that this approach to developmental learning is flawed. When developing the student as thinker or engaged learner, it is much better to approach learning from a particular content or context (Chung, 2012). The content or contextual approach to learning develops a more sophisticated set of academic skills within the student. Chung (2012) notes that content or contextualized learning also helps to provide structure for the developmental education course.

The idea of isolated skills and drills unlinked to content promotes a form of mindless activity that contributes negatively to students’ feelings about self and what he or she believed would be there college experience (Harper, 2012). In the skills and drills practice makes perfect setting, the student is a receptacle, responsible for receiving knowledge from the knowledgeable one (Freire, 1993). Little or no thought is required of them because their biological makeup (genetics) and acculturation to life render them to a class of limited thinkers (Harper, 2012). Or at least this seems to be how they are classified in the higher education setting (Dudley-Marling, 2012).

Kuhn (1999) addressed the issue when discussing genetics and culture as playing a dominant role in the formation of one’s ability to think critically. While critical thinking is not a part of the typical developmental education discussion, research suggested that thinking at any age should be sound, rigorous, and free of fallacies (Kuhn, 1999). Kuhn found that biological endowment tends to constrain cognitive development, while culture has the ability to broaden or develop it further (Kuhn, 1999, citing Gelman & Williams, 1998 and Rogoff, 1998). Elder and Paul (2013) added to the discussion asserting that each person views the world through multiple lenses. These lenses manifest based on culture and life experience, among other things (Elder & Paul, 2013).
For ethnic minorities one of these lenses would encompass their ethnicity or racial identity.

Therefore, the discussion of race, ethnicity, and deficit thinking are pertinent to student success in developmental education because each population contains students that have been marginalized. This is not to negate or trivialize the struggles of racial or ethnic minorities, but rather to bolster the credibility of their academic struggles. Harper and Davis (2012) argued that there are systematic practices endemic to institutions of higher education that prohibit student success and achievement in African Americans. Indeed they contend that race relations in this country have negatively established the view of African American students in a higher education context (Harper et al., 2009).

Reducing the significance of a student’s background knowledge and cultural experiences creates a subservience of thought about oneself (Dudley-Marling, 2012). This is significant because developmental education students have been minimized once by being placed in non-college coursework. The deficit-thinking model adds to minimization because these students begin to associate their life experiences, education, and background as inferior and contributory to their current lower life status. These opinions and views also fail the student by creating a negative connotation for all things they hold dear or thought they learned correctly.

The same can be argued for developmental education students in the community college setting. Their experiences are not valued. Research shows that more than 40% of developmental students fail to complete their developmental course sequence and over half never complete their first course (Price & Roberts, 2009). For the developmental students the sum of their entire academic career to date has produced students who are
not college-ready. Further, out of the 40% of first time community college students who test into a developmental education population, 52% are racial minorities (Fernandez, Barone, & Klepfer, 2014). Because racial minorities are more disproportionately represented in this population, clarifying issues surrounding student success in developmental education will aid in the advancement of this disenfranchised population (Fernandez et al., 2014).

**Reviewing the Need and Urgency for Study**

In recent years student achievement, success, and retention have become prevalent topics in higher education. Instead of being focused solely on admission to college, students are more acutely aware of the need to graduate from college and obtain gainful employment. The poor economy has increased consumers’ consciousness with regard to what they spend, when they decide to spend, and why (Koshal & Koshal, 2000). As a result, in addition to being aware of the necessity to graduate and achieve employment, students are also more apt to scrutinize the cost and duration of college.

A Pew research study recently described the value of a college education and the benefits it can afford over time (Pew Research Center, 2013). The study reported that for some, the benefits of college present a very distant hope that may not be realized. The same study stated 75% of Americans think college is too expensive and that 51% of college presidents believe the United States does not have the best higher education system in the world, and in ten years, the system will be worse than it is now. In all, this study stressed the need to settle the issue of developmental education, as this is undoubtedly a major barrier to student success and a significant factor that impedes student performance.
Whether the failure to realize the benefits of a college education lie in cost or institutional inadequacy, the fact remains that the college consumers are becoming savvier with their money. Consumers want to get their money’s worth, but they also want to be sure that they are acquiring the skills they set out to learn (The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). The synonymous viewpoint of college attendance equating to automatic knowledge is a mindset of former generations. The deference that was once afforded to colleges and professors alike has diminished in the age of the consumer.

People are no longer willing to trust blindly institutions of higher education or their faculty. They instead require a demonstrated record of success as evidenced by student completion rates, diplomas and certificates awarded, job attainment, and increased earnings (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Without this evidence, students are not likely to spend their money on colleges, and state and county taxpayers will also vote to remove support from these institutions. In fact, this is already occurring. Many community colleges have not received full funding dating back to 2007 (Funding Issues in U.S. Community Colleges). There is a strong and growing effort among educators and policymakers to address the needs of this student population (Rutschow & Schneider, 2011).

More importantly, when need/urgency is considered in light of the discussion on Dudley-Marling’s (2012) deficits thinking lens, we can gain an appreciation for the crisis community colleges face. At a time when students are most concerned about obtaining employment and achieving educational goals that will increase their earning power, the ability to achieve these goals is diminished from varying vantage points. Firstly, students are not prepared for college course work. Secondly, students face socioeconomic barriers
that might be reinforced by institutional processes and course structures. Finally, budgetary/funding cuts and restraints reduce the number of programs to be offered, potentially creating a barrier to college success for some students.

Community colleges seek to serve a broad number of students in an effort to promote access to higher education and a better life, and in particular, access to higher education for those who do not have the resources or opportunity to attend a four-year university (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Community colleges have flung open the doors for learning and access, without providing adequate tools for success (Deil-Amen, 2011). This can be seen through an increasing number of developmental students that remain blocked in the developmental pipeline (Smith, 2011; Stuart, 2013). More than half of community college students arrive at college equipped with a high school diploma. Yet they are barely able to read and write proficiently for college-level course work (Boylan, Bonham, & Tafari, 2005).

In fact, experts caution that the cost of developmental education should be given careful consideration in light of the limited benefits (Taschik, 2008). Students are sometimes retained for the next term, but the effect developmental education has on long-term goals such as college completion or college success is not known (Taschik, 2008). Thus, a change in focus from student access to student success is in direct response to fulfilling the community college mission. It is not prudent to continue on an expensive and controversial path through developmental education without knowing that the actions taken are effective.

Vedder (2012) noted that colleges expand developmental course offerings to deal with the dismal preparation of many high school students, yet these courses do a poor job
of improving student performance. This is largely due to the lack of clarity or defined paths of choice for students in developmental populations. Recent research in the area of defined student pathways to success has hinted at a possible cause for the divide between increased student programming to improve student success and the lack of achieved student success. In the community college context, the pathway from initial application to course enrollment requires numerous active decisions in which the default is simply not to enroll (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Underprepared for the challenges of college work, these same students lack the maturity to make decisions regarding their coursework. They are simply overwhelmed by the number of decisions and choices that need to be made in a short amount of time. Scott-Clayton’s (2011) comments merely emphasize the need to not only implement programs or pathways that promote student success, but to identify clear career paths to these programs or a more proscribed schedule.

**Proactive Change Initiatives**

Kezar (2001) states that proactive change, rather than change led by the environment, is usually in the best interest of higher education. While the environment has certainly dictated the need to focus on developmental education and student success, a formula has yet to be determined. It is best to assess developmental education initiatives now to gain a footing and maintain control over what these initiatives look like and how they are implemented. If this does not occur, higher education runs the risk of being subject to mandates and heavy outside regulation in an area that has enjoyed academic autonomy and integrity since its inception (Bailey & Morest, 2006).

Despite numerous programs implemented by both two-year and four-year institutions alike with the hope of decreasing the number of developmental education
students, the numbers instead continue to grow. Most incoming freshman classes at four-year colleges place more than 20% of their students into developmental courses (CCRC, 2009). In a recent national sample of 51 community colleges, 33% of students were referred to developmental reading courses alone (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010), while approximately 58% place into developmental education in general (Attewell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006). Since developmental education is on the rise in higher education and shows no sign of slowing, a review of accelerated programs in developmental education is prudent and necessary. It is important to identify what is working while simultaneously discontinuing unorganized and ineffective approaches that result in multiple new programs and older courses and initiatives fading.

The Case for Acceleration

Some data support the use of acceleration in developmental education (Boyd, 2004). By definition, accelerated learning programs are structured to enable students to take courses and earn credits in a shorter period of time versus a traditional 16-week semester, through a combination of courses within a specific discipline (Boyd, 2004). Generally speaking, these courses are smaller, boutique, or seminar-style classes that allow for both more time in class to do work and more time individually with the professor. The preliminary data on such programs boasts of as much as 50% improvement in developmental student performance (Gold, 2013). Performance is defined by successful completion of the accelerated course and continued persistence.

Acceleration: Old Things Become New

Accelerated learning is not a new student initiative. Dating back to the sixties, accelerated learning was evolving as a general concept used to increase the amount of
learning that takes place within a given period of time (Levin & Calcagno, 2008). As scholars noted, accelerated learning is affected by time, motivation, and course content (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2008). In other words, in accelerated programs there is a deliberate effort not only to consider program strengths and deficiencies, but also to consider the student as an individual, not a part of a homogenous population (Collins, 2010).

Acceleration has always been associated with delivering information in shorter time frames (Lee & Horsfall, 2010). Generally speaking, accelerated programs are primarily concerned with time (Lee & Horsfall, 2010). Students need to spend more time in class, more time with the professor, and more time discussing the material. Harsh and Mallory (2013) extended the conversation with regard to acceleration and student success in that they recognize student learning and success as dependent upon four criteria: a) capacity to learn, b) personal effort, c) time devoted to learning, and d) quality of learning resources or course programs. Indeed, this enhanced view of student learning crystalizes the notion of integrated and deliberate course programs, but also of support services for students within the academic setting. Again, time is recognized as a relevant component to acceleration, but the conditions affecting the students’ lived experiences in and outside of the classroom are also expressed as potential helps or hindrances to student performance.

While the time component in accelerated learning is not new, the concept of working with a younger or more traditionally aged student population is. Accelerated learning has also been characterized by the fact that it is typically offered to adult populations (Wlodkowski, R. J & Kasworm, C.E., 2003). Recognizing that adults need a
less traditional schedule, accelerated learning provided the ideal answer to enable working adults the chance to earn a college degree (Wlodkowski, R.J. & Kasworm, C.E., 2003). In line with this school of thought, acceleration is typical when it comes to the gifted student, as it is seen as a means to keep the smart student engaged (Kulik, 1992). This is the reason why Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses are so popular in our high school populations. They offer the reward of more knowledge and preparation to the students who are well on their way to a college degree.

The delivery of a content course in half the time or during the same time frame as another course in the sequence would enable the developmental student to fulfill two requirements in the time it would take to complete one. Accelerated courses in developmental education could also remedy the negative impact of developmental placement (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Research has shown that students with lower levels of preparation respond more favorably to developmental education (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). For students on the margin of remediation, there is a negative impact to the developmental placement (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Since accelerated programs in developmental education condense time and speed movement through the developmental pipeline, students at the high and low end of college preparedness should view the placement into an accelerated developmental course in a positive light. At the end of the accelerated course sequence, these students would be in the same place as their peers who entered college ready.

Peter Adams from the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) developed an innovative strategy for increasing student success in developmental education writing programs (Bow Community College, 2011). His Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) targets students who placed into upper-level developmental writing
courses. Through ALP, students are able to dual enroll in both developmental and freshman composition, completing the sequence in one term. The program has doubled success rates in developmental writing at CCBC Baltimore and is rapidly being duplicated in varying forms across the nation (Adams, 2012).

As per initial findings at CCBC, ALP certainly increases student retention, persistence, and success (Stuart, 2013). Because many students are frustrated by being placed into developmental courses and ultimately discontinue their collegiate studies, Adams’ accelerated path to learning writing offers a clearly defined plan to achieve college-level coursework within year one of community college studies. Knowing that it is still possible to be college ready and in fact attend college courses within the first term if not year of college is extremely motivating for students because they came to college to attend college classes (Adams, 2011). In addition, gives students the confidence to succeed and removes some of the sting from being placed into developmental writing.

Because community colleges tend to serve populations that are historically disenfranchised, creating structured paths toward student success is critical (Scott-Clayton, 2011; Taschik, 2008). To fulfill the community college mission, we, as community college leaders, must solve the developmental dilemma for an increasing number of students in our population and do so quickly. Without offering a clear and swift path to college coursework, we close the door of access to a large portion of the population. Specifically, we close the door to ethnic minorities who view the community college as their only door to a successful and more prosperous life. We also run the risk of losing students simply because we are not delivering what they need, i.e., a quality education, as evidenced by their success. Success in this sense is a very relative term that
might mean course completion, continued persistence, degree attainment, or certificate completion (Guess, 2008).

A handful of recent studies have used rigorous statistical methods to compare the success of students who enroll in developmental courses with that of similar students who enroll directly in college-level courses. These studies generally show little positive effect of developmental education. The present study addresses the success of students in accelerated developmental programs in writing. Rather than viewing their performance at present or over time with students in college level coursework, the study focuses on why students are successful in accelerated learning programs in developmental writing from their perspective. While there is no one answer to explain the results, I believe that negative stereotypes associated with developmental learning coupled with the initial shock and confusion about being enrolled in non-college level courses affects the mental and emotional well being of the student. Research has shown that a deflated psyche and emotional instability affect student motivation and thereby performance (Harper, 2014).

Conversely, the results of these studies are most reliable for students at the upper end of the developmental range—that is, for students who are assigned to developmental education, but who score near the developmental “cut-off” point on placement tests (Bettinger & Long, 2005). A growing number of community colleges are experimenting with strategies for accelerating the progress of students in need of developmental education, particularly those who are near the “college-ready” level of preparation (Bailey & Morest, 2006).

While Bettinger and Bailey’s literature provide support for the Adams approach to acceleration, colleges across the country are creating ALP programs for their specific
student populations. Like these colleges, one of the college’s chosen for this study has implemented a form of ALP to meet students’ needs while working within the current framework for space, budget, and decision-making authority. At one of the colleges studied, there are no tiered series of cutoff scores that permit the student to enter ALP or go into a developmental track. From the college’s perspective, ALP works for everyone, even the lowest levels of developmental. Therefore, at this school, students are allowed to self-select into ALP as long as they test into developmental classes in the first instance. Like Harsh and Mallory (2013), this college acknowledges that life may sometimes get in the way and issues such as time devoted to school could affect student performance in class. Unlike Needham (1994), this college is not willing to concede that these students are “loose cannons” from “deprived backgrounds [and] intellectual wastelands” (p. 27). In contrast, these are students who need help organizing their lives and recognizing their value as students.

**The Research Study**

This proposal details foundational research in the area of student success, specifically with regard to accelerated learning programs in writing. It adopts a case study approach using interviews, reviewing surveys, and analysing non-participant observations to gather data. The goal of this study is to determine what makes accelerated programs work and in what areas accelerated programs might be improved or specifically tailored to create greater numbers of successful students in developmental education, especially in populations with a large number of ethnic minorities. Particular attention is given to the students’ voices and the social constructs that limit community colleges in their attempts at acceleration and the affect this has specifically on ethnic
minorities in developmental education. In addition to outlining the methodology, data collection, and data analysis in some detail, this study discusses ethical considerations.

The study will focus on two classes of ALP students and their lived experience in ALP, as well as two classes in Developmental Integrated Reading and Writing (DIRW) and the students lived experience through this program of study. Of particular interest are the students’ thoughts and reflections about ALP and DIRW and how they believe the program has helped them to become successful in a writing course. With unsuccessful students, attention is focused on why the student believed he failed?

Irrespective of population, (passing student or failing student), the research will focus on characteristics of a) time, b) motivation, c) support services, and d) course content or material. The analysis of time will be comprehensive, considering acceleration, (time compression in delivery of course materials), as well as, the students’ time spent learning. With respect to motivation, the study will consider what motivates the students. A holistic valuation of internal motivators, external motivators, and course or study motivators will be analyzed to establish trends from the students’ perspectives in accelerated programs in developmental education.

As the literature review has suggested, many studies have covered each of these issues in an isolated manner and from the perspective of the professoriate. It seems clear that each issue impacts the student success equation in a developmental setting. This study explores what students think about these variables, but also what they think about self-performance/behavior.

These variables will be examined through the students’ eyes. Once success indicators have been clearly identified, these same measures can be implemented or
cultivated on a large scale to provide assistance to developmental education in general. The goal is to thoroughly analyze the students’ responses and draw correlations between their thoughts and current literature in the field. Key to the study is a rich analysis of what is effective in the students’ eyes.
Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter will discuss the research methodology used to explore student success in accelerated developmental writing courses. While popular, accelerated developmental writing courses lack uniformity and therefore, by nature, create a complex landscape for review. Through a detailed analysis of data collected from students participating in accelerated developmental writing courses, this research sought to identify key contributors to student success within these programs, from a student’s perspective.

This research study employed qualitative methods to analyze student success and the students’ lived experiences in accelerated developmental writing courses. A qualitative research inquiry was chosen because qualitative research is a methodology that draws from both the subject and the setting (Evans, 1998). This form of inquiry most aptly fits the research employed because accelerated developmental writing courses are developing in varying forms across the country. As such, there are no two courses that are identical, so there is much to be learned from the types of courses, programs, participants, and settings in which the courses take place.

Research Design and Justification

In an effort to address a rapidly changing demographic in higher education, student success programs, and more specifically, accelerated developmental writing courses are on the rise. Since access is no longer a central focus, (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), higher education today is concerned with success, persistence, graduation, and certificate completion. Using a case study model allowed me to capture the complexity...
of the subject studied (Stake, 1995). Whether a single or collective case, the study of particularity and complexity of the case gives the researcher a better understanding of the case(s) being probed (Stake, 1995).

Case studies are “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ of a case or multiple cases over time through detail, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). As Stake further explained:

we are interested in them [case studies] for both their uniqueness and commonality. We would like to hear their stories. We may have reservations about some things the people tell us, just as they will question some of the things we will tell about them. But we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary posits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn (p, 1).

This research used a collective case study approach. A collective case study involves a number of cases being studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition (Stake, 2006). The population that was studied was the varying groups of students in accelerated developmental writing courses. Stake (2006) referred to the phenomenon, population or general condition being investigated as the quintain. In this study, the accelerated developmental writing courses make up the quintain.

In a collective case study, the researcher begins with the quintain, but also looks at some of its single cases to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon at hand (Stake, 2006). In this study, I was interested in understanding how and why acceleration works for developmental student populations in writing. Using an interpretive
constructivist paradigm, the goal was to rebuild the students’ feelings and emotions about their experiences with accelerated developmental writing courses (Jones, 2001). By gathering data from multiple perspectives to ascertain what actually occurred and why (Stake, 2006), I was able to construct a reality that reflects the experiences of a particular group of developmental students. One of the objectives of the research was to produce data to inform higher education about how we might better serve this student population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also hoped to uncover some best practices to guide practitioners in developmental education.

Two different types of accelerated developmental writing courses were explored. One course intentionally blends reading curriculum with writing to effectuate acceleration through the developmental writing course sequence. The other uses writing curriculum alone to accelerate students through the developmental writing sequence. Both courses boast of improving student retention and success, but there is not much documented evidence about why these courses work or for whom. Most of the conversation surrounding accelerated programs/courses deals with the immediate success these programs yield in terms of course persistence and course completion (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). However, little that is known about why the courses are successful or what exactly makes them work, particularly from the students’ perspective (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2008).

Some scholars have posited that accelerated courses work because they offer students more time with the subject matter and the instructor (Flank, 2012). Others maintained that they work because there is intentionality to the curriculum structure (Calcagno & Long, 2008). Despite these affirming statements, there are few data to back
up the assertions. Most scholars would acknowledge that the programs are too new and too little is known about the programs to identify clearly why they work (Bailey, 2009). This study sought to add to what is known about the courses, but also to clearly identify the key components that contribute to student success in accelerated developmental writing courses.

**The Role of the Researcher**

Constructivism assumes that meaning is constructed or built by individuals and that even the meaning of the phenomenon studied is left open to construction by the researcher’s interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, my role as researcher in this study was to interpret the behavior of the cases, but also to consider personal behavior. Deliberate thinking about what one is doing and why provides greater cultural, political, and theoretical context for the study (Alvesson & Skolderg, 2009).

In this approach the researcher becomes intimately intertwined in the collection and interpretation of data under a constructivist inquiry. It therefore becomes critical for the researcher to be continuously aware of her role as researcher, but also as participant. Participant observers are useful to research in a variety of ways. They provide researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expressions of feelings, to determine who interacts with whom, to grasp how participants communicate with each other, and to verify how much time is spent on various activities (Schmuck, 1997). Participant observation allows researchers to observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be impolitic, impolite, or insensitive. Researchers also observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those
informants (Rossman & Wilson, 1985).

DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) argued that “the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method” (p. 92). Participant observation may also be used to increase the validity of the study (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Observations may help the researcher have a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study. When used in conjunction with interviews, document analysis, surveys, and questionnaires, the validity of the research study is stronger (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Overall, participant observation can be used to help answer descriptive research questions, to build theory, or to generate or test hypotheses (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

It is also worth noting that participant observation takes time. To conduct participant observation, one must live in the context to facilitate prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). The findings are considered to be more trustworthy when the researcher can show that she spent a considerable amount of time in the setting. The prolonged time permits the researcher to have multiple interactions with the community or multiple observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). It also allows for time for the participant observer to become engaged in the environment as an active member, i.e., participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1995).

The reader may not view the findings as credible if the researcher only spent a week in the culture; however, he/she would be more assured that the findings are accurate, if the researcher lived in the culture for an extended time or visited the culture repeatedly over time. Thus, participant observation adds a layer of rigor and validity to
this case study analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Living in the culture enables one to learn the language and participate in everyday activities.

I brought over ten years’ experience in teaching writing to this research. I have taught to both developmental and college-ready in online and face-to-face formats. Moreover, I am an advocate of accelerated developmental writing courses.

The Researcher’s Journey Toward Inquiry

As a new adjunct at my local community college in January 2003, I was surprised to be assigned three sections of developmental writing to teach. Being new to the field of teaching, I was very comfortable with my own writing skills, but somewhat skeptical about how to translate this knowledge effectively to a group of college students. Moreover, my educational experience was very different than that of the typical community college student. After attending four years of a traditional liberal arts college, I matriculated directly into law school and then the workforce. Thus, relaying subject matter, but also relating to a different type of student population occupied much of my thoughts leading up to the start of the semester.

Once in the classroom, I soon discovered the vast difference between my academic path and the academic path of the developmental learner. Unlike my freshman year experience, where I arrived to class with fresh notebooks, pens, and a desire to learn, the students who sat before me were in a word, there. They seemed to have very little interest in the classroom or me, and it was clear I needed to penetrate a shell that had developed over time. Through much prodding and personal interaction, I was able to ascertain that students were disenchanted in addition to being underprepared. They truly felt as though their entire school experience had been a waste of time and proof positive of this notion
was the fact that they had been placed in this developmental class. They had not reached the milestone of college entry and were in yet another environment that let them down.

Due to open enrollment policies, I knew that community colleges serviced the majority of developmental students. However, I was not aware of the emotional and in some cases social impact this designation had on each student. It was clear to me that starting an educational journey with such a negative attitude and predisposition to the learning environment could not bode well for their academic performance. So I did the best I could during that term and vowed to learn more about developmental education.

About seven years later, and just a short time after taking the position of Department Chair, I began to engage in conversations with colleagues about developmental education and what we might do to improve: a) the students’ attitudes toward developmental; b) the success rates of developmental students; and c) the overall rapport between the developmental student and the professor. After eight years as a faculty member in writing, I knew all too well the abhorrence for non-college courses that students brought to a developmental class. Shame, annoyance, anger, and inadequacy are just some of the emotions students would express at a developmental placement. These emotions often translated into poor performance, dismal success rates, and a lack of persistence.

During the spring of 2011, a writing center learning assistant hosted a guest speaker, Peter Adams. He came to discuss his ALP program at Baltimore County Community College. We were so excited at the high rate of passing his program boasted that we began work to develop our own version of ALP. In the fall of 2011, we launched three sections of ALP. Each section was composed of a freshman composition and two
developmental writing course pairs. The freshman composition class had 21 students, both college-ready and developmental, while the developmental courses had eight students each. The developmental courses would blend into a regular freshman composition sequence.

At the close of that term, we experienced a 98% pass rate. With such impressive numbers we were eager to expand the program. While we began to move in that direction, I personally considered the reason why the pass rate increased so significantly. New to a doctoral program, I felt the need to reflect upon almost everything, but also, I had a newfound interest in research and data. It was apparent the student population had not changed, because we were at the same school and had the same demographic as we had in prior years. It was also clear that the curriculum had not changed. Our freshman composition and developmental writing classes still had the same course objectives, goals, and outcomes. So what made the pairing of the two courses during one semester so much more effective than taking them in an isolated format? This research has provided some plausible answers to this question from the students’ perspectives.

**Identifying Characteristics**

Stake (1995) suggested outlining the main issues or characteristics of each case to explore further. Characteristics are outlined through data that are collected and then categorized (Stake, 1995). Stake also suggested coding the categorized data at the analysis stage to clearly identify characteristics presented within the study. This allowed me to identify characteristics unique to each case, while highlighting those that were common in each setting. This process of identifying characteristics from the cases allowed for a convergence of the data during the evaluative and interpretative process. It permitted me, as researcher, an opportunity to reflect on the cases collectively and
provided “stronger interpretation” and “better theorizing” about what had occurred (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2008).

The study as performed allowed the cases, the emerged characteristics, and the data collected to shape the research. It also permitted me to state with more confidence what characteristics truly affected student success in accelerated developmental writing courses. Multiple data collection and analysis methods were adopted to further develop and understand the cases, shaped by context and emergent data (Stake, 1995). This qualitative approach “explores a real life contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2003).

**Setting**

For this study, data were collected from two community colleges. While located in different states, both schools share similar suburban settings, and both have student populations that test into developmental writing at a rate of 50% or higher each year. The courses examined for this study were English 095/English 121 ALP and Developmental Reading and Writing (DIRW). Both course types represent independent cases of students taking a form of accelerated developmental writing. Engaging in a simultaneous analysis of these courses constitutes a collective instrumental case study. The collective instrumental case helps to provide insight or information about the theory or case being studied through the examination of multiple or nested cases that are observed alongside one another (Stake, 1995, 2006).

In this study two cases of students are examined from cohorts of ALP, and two cases of students are studied from DIRW. Each case is unique and a singular study that
helps to define and explain the phenomena of acceleration through writing, albeit from varying institutions and geographical locations. The studies while concentrated single inquiries (Stake, 1995, 1998), were viewed holistically and globally. In other words, as researcher I identified what was unique about each case, but more importantly, what the cases shared as commonalties.

With accelerated developmental writing courses, Stake (1995) posits that issue analysis is not clear, but complicated by the complexities of life and experiences. With multiple case studies, such issues can become even more complex because they will vary from case to case due to the individual participants. However, despite the complexities of each case presented, the collective analysis provides more detail about how and why acceleration works. Drawing on commonalities within those characteristics of success (i.e. the way they work) strengthen the research findings.

Research was conducted at Darrow Community College and Bow Community College. At the time of this study, Darrow Community College enrollment was approximately 11,400 students, over 55% of which were women and approximately 70% were ethnic minorities. The majority of students at Darrow, 78%, were enrolled at the college part-time. Approximately 41% of the students were between the ages of 21 and 30. Darrow was also home to a large international population and whites made up only 28.1% of the student population. Approximately 52% of the student population tested into some form of developmental coursework.

At the time of this research Bow Community College had approximately 14,000 students. More than half of this population tested into developmental education. Unlike Darrow, Bow had a student population largely made up of Caucasian students, 68%. 
Bow and Darrow both shared largely female populations, with Bow boasting over 50% of their student populations as female. The majority age group at Bow differed from Darrow in that Bow serviced a more traditional college-age group, with over 60% of the students in attendance being under 21 years of age and full time.

Having worked in both settings, I was what Stake (1995) referred to as a biographer. In case study research, a biographer is a researcher who is focused on a phase or segment of the life of an individual (Stake, 1995). Various reports in psychology (Bromley, 1986), sociology (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2008), and education (Stake, 1995, 2006) have studied the individual as the unit of analysis, and have used the case study method to develop rich and comprehensive understandings about people.

In this research study the goal was to achieve rich, comprehensive analysis about the individuals involved in accelerated developmental writing courses, but also the collective cases (writing programs) being studied. As Yin (2008) described, collective or multiple case studies follow replication logic, selected to predict similar results (literal replication) or contrasting results (theoretical replication).

**Research Questions**

This study examined the following research questions:

1. How does an accelerated developmental writing course promote or achieve student success?

2. What are the central components of accelerated developmental writing courses that contribute to student success?

3. What traits does the student possess that aid their success in accelerated developmental writing courses?
Each question addresses the participants lived experience in acceleration (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). By probing participants directly and observing their behavior within the environment, the researcher ascertained their experiences as they related to acceleration. I was also able to delineate or identify the actual elements of success (Stake, 2006).

**Participants & Sampling**

The benefits of collective case study are in part due to limited case selection. Stake (2006) noted that two or three cases do not show enough of the interactivity between programs and situations, yet more than 10 would be too much. For this dissertation study, four cases were selected. The cases are partially identified, as they must be classes of students within an ALP or DIRW setting (Stake, 2006). Partially identified cases are common in the social science setting, as is the selection of cases to be studied by the director or researcher (Stake, 2006). Stake listed three main criteria for selecting cases:

- Is the case relevant to the quintain?
- Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?
- Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts?

For this study, each case is relevant to the quintain because they contain students immersed in accelerated writing programs. To achieve the criterion of diversity across contexts, cases were selected from varying cross-sections of the colleges’ schedules, including evening sections. In this way, a more complete view of the student populations was achieved. I was able to see how the phenomenon of acceleration performed in different environments (Stake 2006). Each of the cases provided a good
opportunity to learn about complexity and contexts because of the diversity of individuals within the cases and the varied geographical and collegiate settings.

The target population of participants from within the selected cases included students who had taken a DIRW or ALP course and achieved a C or better and those who were currently enrolled in DIRW or ALP. The research also considered students who had taken DIRW or ALP and received a D, F, or Incomplete. Since the study focused on student success in accelerated writing courses, it was important to analyze both successful and unsuccessful students to determine more objectively which factors might be more prominent in the student success equation. The preference was to interview students who had successfully completed the accelerated developmental writing course. In addition, a review of student satisfaction survey data was employed in an effort to ensure both reliability and triangulation of the data.

The students interviewed were selected randomly from rosters generated from the Colleague System at each institution. Once the names were pulled from the roster, I solicited the help of a gatekeeper to aid me in building trust with the identified students, so they would be more apt to participate in the interview (Hatch, 2002).

In qualitative research, gatekeepers help the researcher gain access to and build trust with the population being studied. A total of eight students were selected from each case for interview. Conducting eight interviews per case was not the desired result, however, I wanted to select enough students to ensure there was at least one interview from each case.
Data Collection

Secondary review of student satisfaction survey data collected. The first step in this study involved a review of secondary data collected via a student satisfaction survey instrument. The point of reviewing the student satisfaction surveys was to see if any baseline themes emerged from surveys students completed about their courses. Through the identification of baseline or emerging themes, the researcher was able to determine what might be explored further through other modes of data collection (Stake, 2006).

During this review, I paid close attention to the comments students provided about their courses. Once the emerging themes were identified, I conducted a series of interviews with individual students to help clarify themes. The interviews also helped to

Figure 1. Proposed Study Plan
contextualize each theme further, given each student’s background and personal experience. This was achieved through more questioning that was intentionally linked to the themes presented.

The following table illustrates a simple chart for coding the initial survey data that was documented for analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
<th>Theme 5</th>
<th>Theme 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does an accelerated developmental writing course achieve student success?</td>
<td>What are the central components of accelerated developmental writing courses that contribute to student success?</td>
<td>What traits do students possess that aids their success in an accelerated developmental writing course?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* Emerging themes and research questions

The most common methods of case study are observation, interview, coding, data management, and interpretation (Stake, 2006). This list is not exhaustive and often case studies use multiple forms of data collection to achieve the goal of evaluating the general and the specific. Case studies document everything: hence, the researcher is charged
with noting the usual and unusual. Both are equally important because they contribute to
the holistic view of the quintain being studied (Stake, 2006). Key to any good study is a
good organizational plan for the case study that is flexible because the issue development
in case study research is ongoing (Stake, 2006).

**Interviews.** A series of semi-structured interviews included pre-prepared
questions, unstructured follow-ups, and impromptu open-ended questions directed to the
students. These diverse question types sought to elicit information from the students.
The questions allowed the interviewees the opportunity to express their ideas using their
own words instead of fitting their thoughts and perceptions into pre-set categories
determined by the researcher (Martin, 2010). There was no set length for interviews;
rather the interviews were long enough to establish rapport and obtain necessary
information (Martin, 2010).

There was a specific number of questions to guide the discussion however, the
real goal of the interviews was to allow the students freedom to tell their story. Thus, the
students’ responses provided direction for the interviews, and allowed me to follow up
until there was clarity or until the student felt he or she had expressed himself fully on the
topic at hand. At the outset of each interview, a demographic sheet was completed. The
demographic sheet inquired about gender, age, highest level of education in their family,
and place of birth.

Interviews were conducted in multiple formats: in person, via Skype, and over
telephone. Telephone interviews are useful and productive because they allow for
conversation at a designated place and time with minimal interruption of one’s daily life
schedule (Holt, 2010). For the interviewer, this might mean being able to be present at
work, yet having the ability to still conduct interviews during a lunch break. For an
interviewee, this might mean being able to be present at home for young children or
significant others, and still being able to complete the interview from a quiet room within
the home (Holt, 2010).

Telephone interviews were added to the type of interviews to be conducted due to
the population of students being interviewed. Community college students are very busy.
Many are adults with families and others are more traditional students by virtue of their
age, yet they still work to support themselves and lead full lives as working adults (Cohen
& Brawer, 2003). For another group of students the geographic proximity of their
physical location and that of the researcher presented an issue that further compounded
work/life issues and time constraints.

Therefore, the use of telephone interviews for this population was an effective and
appropriate method to collect data because it allowed the field of participants to remain
open to each group of accelerated developmental writing students, rather than have issues
such as time, place, and circumstance restrict the pool of interviewees. Given the
constraints on time for the participants, plus the added distance for travel between the
researcher and some participants, telephone interviews offered a layer of practicality and
convenience to the process that enabled the research to take place.

This added layer of convenience should not cause one to question the validity or
effectiveness of the interviewing method (Holt, 2010). In fact, researchers caution
against viewing the telephone interview as less effective than the face-to-face interview
(Hajebi et. al., 2012). The telephone interview is better viewed as a valid interviewing
methodology in addition to face-to-face interviews. It is one that offers the added benefit
of convenience to the participants (Holt, 2010).

Likewise, videoconferencing tools such as Skype are also an acceptable means for conducting interviews for research. Skype allows a researcher to conduct a pseudo face-to-face interview with participants (Toldi, 2011). Having both audio and video capabilities, Skype offers the interviewer the benefit of visual cues and observation, which are not fully present in the telephone interview (Hanna, 2012). Skype also allows the interviewer to engage in active listening strategies through observation. The interviewer is able to capture gestures, nods, or even quizzical grimaces during the interview process (Hanna, 2012). Such observations are just as valuable to the researcher as the words the interviewees state.

The interviews will focus on the student’s background in school, familial structure, college decision-making process, and actual accelerated developmental writing class experience. Participants’ responses to the interview questions will yield data to support answers for the following research questions:

1. How does an accelerated developmental writing course achieve student success?
2. What are the central components of accelerated developmental writing courses that contribute to student success?
3. What traits do the students possess that aids their success in an accelerated developmental writing course?

A recording device was used, with participant consent, during the interviews. Researchers in the qualitative research field support the need for recording interviews (Yin, 2008). Stern and Porr (2011) identified a need to record interviews to ensure all
information provided by the participant is heard and captured. Recording interviews is an effective method of capturing interview data (Yin, 2008). As such, interviews with participants in this study were recorded after participant consent was obtained.

**Data Analysis**

The data retrieved during the research process were categorized by theme. The themes that evolved were interconnected with the students’ overall college experience, but they also covered the span of the research questions posed in this study specifically. For many students, a reference to their college experience meant referring to their accelerated developmental writing course, because developmental courses are gateway or entry-level courses that students must complete before taking college-level courses.

Open coding is an “analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (Patton, 2002). In this case, the students’ responses to student satisfaction surveys and interviews guided the creation of baseline categories. While the student satisfaction surveys were not collected specifically for this research, I used them as secondary data collected but used for another purpose.

Stake (1995) described two strategic ways to analyze data: Categorical Aggregation and Direct Interpretation. He also recognized that there is no right way to conduct case study analysis. Each researcher needs to find the forms of analysis that work for him or her based on their experience and reflection (Stake, 1995). Therefore the data analysis set forth in this study follows a Stake approach.

Because this research embodies qualitative analysis, the data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously (Merriam, 1998). The researcher questioned the participants about accelerated learning, while coding the responses into categories. In
addition, each case was studied as an independent case and as against the other case. This two-level, multiple case study analysis is typical (Stake, 1995). Viewed in this context each case can be examined holistically, on its own, or through a particular lens or aspect that spans the cases explored (Yin, 2008). The goal of the analysis was to identify common characteristics, while paying attention to outliers. This form of inquiry will demonstrate the effect each factor has on the participants and their course success and ultimately, their academic persistence.

**Rigor/Validity**

Validity refers to the degree a study accurately reflects or assesses the concept the researcher seeks to measure (Creswell, 2003). Creswell states that research uses an array of validation methods to make a study more credible and rigorous (2003). To establish credibility in a qualitative study, the researcher seeks believability based on coherence, insight and instrumental utility (Eisner, 1991). Likewise trustworthiness is measured though a verification process that contemplates the researcher’s positions, general assumptions, bias and values (Creswell, 2003).

As such, qualitative studies are not capable of being replicated exactly, but they do provide a high degree of description and detailed information about the case or issue under examination. In fact, qualitative research conducted within this study, contained unique, internal layers of triangulation and fact-checking via a comparison of multi-source data such as interviews and survey documents that converge from different sources helping the researcher ascertain truth.

Credibility for this study was achieved with data triangulation, researcher reflective practices, and thick, rich description. Engaging in reflective processes
throughout the research via observation, note-taking, and writing reflective memorandums, aided co-construction and yielded transparency in the research work (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

Creswell has identified strengths of such a design as:

1. Providing ease in implementation.
2. Facilitating nimble movement from one stage to the next.
3. Generating rich detail regarding the phenomenon being studied (2003).

One drawback to this form of research design is that it does take time to implement.

**Ethical Issues**

In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Rowan University, Darrow Community College and Bow Community College, permission to conduct research was obtained. Accordingly a request for review form was filed and information about the principal investigator, the project title and type, funding, type of review requested, number and type of subjects were all documented within the IRB system. In addition, the IRB application described the project and its significance, outlined methods and procedures, participants, and research status. Each participant agreed to participate via a signed informed consent form.

Each participant has been kept anonymous and his or her identity protected through a coding process that identifies each survey instrument and/or questionnaire by number. Moreover, participant interviews were assigned fictitious names. During the pendency of this research study, all data collected has been kept under locked file cabinet and/or password protected, encrypted efiles. This includes any surveys, study data,
electronic files, interview tapes, and transcripts. Upon request, participants will be provided with summary data. This summarized information will not be traceable to any one individual or research participant.
Chapter 4

Results

This study was designed to explore accelerated developmental writing courses to determine from the students’ perspectives, if and why accelerated writing courses are successful. I used multiple means of data collection from reviewing student satisfaction surveys, open-ended, structured interviews, to classroom observation.

The data from this study were collected from four different cases of accelerated developmental writing courses. The two cases from Bow Community College were from an accelerated learning program in writing. The two cases from Darrow Community College were from developmental integrated reading and writing courses. The accelerated learning program in writing consisted of a basic skills course in writing, paired with a college-level English course. The two classes met over the course of the entire Spring term. The developmental integrated reading and writing course compressed the curriculum for developmental reading and developmental writing into one class. These two courses also met over the entire Spring term.

The findings presented in this chapter were organized by case and compiled by emerged themes from survey and interview data.

Summary of Data Retrieved from Survey

Students from both Darrow Community College and Bow Community College completed end of term surveys. Capturing data from this survey instrument ensured that I retrieved information from students who actually completed the course. The total number of students with survey responses was 56. The survey data participants were anonymous to me, so I was unable to connect specific information obtained to a particular student’s voice.
The survey data revealed six themes that impacted student success in accelerated developmental writing courses. The table below lists the six themes and the number of students that made a comment about the particular theme.

Table 1

*Survey Data from Student Satisfaction Survey Review*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Interaction is a Source of Motivation</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sources of Motivation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Preparation &amp; Planning</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial Support</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support from the Institution</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Support</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey data provided a general snapshot of students from accelerated developmental writing courses at Darrow and Bow. This information was used in concert with interview data to increase understanding about accelerated developmental writing courses. Since this study was concerned with students’ voices, the survey data helped to amplify the message of those voices.

**Case-by-Case Analysis**

The cases described below came from interviews of students at Darrow Community College and Bow Community College. There were 15 total students interviewed at Darrow Community College across two cases. Four students total were
interviewed at Bow Community College across two cases. Site difficulties at Bow impeded my ability to interview more students.

The table below provides an overview of the case-by-case emerged themes at a glance, as well as a summary of the data for each case of students interviewed. In addition to the summary data tables for each case, I also provided a table of themes as emerged from each student interview. All participants are referred to by pseudonym to maintain their anonymity.

Table 2

*Themes between Cases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Emerged Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | ● Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation  
      | ● Other Sources of Motivation  
      | ● Academic Support from the Institution  
      | ● Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation  
      | ● Curriculum |
| 2    | ● Peer Support  
      | ● Other Sources of Motivation  
      | ● Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation |
| 3    | ● Curriculum  
      | ● Peer Support  
      | ● Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation |
| 4    | ● Curriculum  
      | ● Academic Support from the Institution |

**Case 1**

The first case of students was from Darrow Community College. These students were placed into a developmental integrated reading and writing course as a result of scores on their college placement exams. The class met during the Spring 2015 during an evening session.
This group of students was very diverse in terms of ethnicity. The following table illustrates the student group by demographic and emergent themes. Despite the racial and ethnic diversity present in Case 1, all of the students spoke English as their primary language. For these students, college was synonymous with their course in accelerated developmental writing because it was their first course. Without it, they would not be “in college.” Below is a table of themes that emerged during interviews with students within Case 1.

Table 3

*Student Demographic and Theme Identification*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation, Other Sources of Motivation, Academic Support from the Institution, Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominique</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Other Sources of Motivation, Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation, Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genie</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Arabian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation, Familial Support, Other Sources of Motivation, Peer Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation, Other Sources of Motivation, College Preparation &amp; Planning, Familial Support, Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dion</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>College Preparation &amp; Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation Peer Support, Familial Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of Themes

**Faculty interaction is a source of motivation.** As evidenced by the table above, Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation was a dominant theme for this group of students. Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation was any point of interaction from faculty to student or student to faculty. It included class, email, office hours, before/after class conferencing, informal chance encounters on campus, and the like. For example, one student reported:

Well this class. I guess I like the class. My teacher is comfortable. I just take this class and it is good environment. Like my teacher is more friendly to me and helps. That’s why I like come here and stay. He was so friendly and help (Sara)

The teacher guy is cool. He makes it easy to come. Makes it easy to come to class (Dominique)

When asked directly, how a faculty member makes it easy to come to class Dominique responded:

“He wants you to come. I feel like he really would be disappointed if I was not there. He knows me.” This is a valuable piece of information because the student was responding to the faculty member’s concern for her. She went to class because she did not want to disappoint the faculty member. Therefore, Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation served as an external motivation, driving class attendance.

Furthermore, the professor made the students feel wanted, so they came to class. Several students conveyed this message in their interviews.

I feel like the professor was helpful. He wanted me to do well. Each day I get to work with him, it makes me feel better (Sara)
From the students’ statements, it was clear that they liked their teacher. He provided a welcoming environment that encouraged them to come to class and participate. He also took time to explain coursework and offered information in multiple formats, both online and in person. The students referenced academic support in their responses, but the pervasive feeling students conveyed was about emotional support. For example:

About this class, the teacher is cool. I can be doing better with the work, but that’s my fault. I go to class because I like the teacher. He explains the work in class and what is online (Genie)

This quotation illustrated the importance of the faculty member to the students. According to the students, the faculty member was likeable, but more importantly, he explained the work. “The professor. He is very nice. He makes me laugh” (Yolanda). The personal characteristic of being “likeable” and the fact that students understand and relate to the faculty member served as external motivations for the students to attend class. They have formed a positive connection with the faculty member.

Well I feel the instructor was very open and clear on what the curriculum was and what we were supposed to do. He gives you the feeling that you can come to him with any questions. He is not going to judge you or anything. I’m not saying that most teachers are I’m just saying that you can connect with the teacher that is good because that can be one of your motivations as far as going forward in school. You can look back and say that’s the teacher that helped me (Hector)

It was clear that having this type of faculty interaction impacted them positively. Survey data supported this assertion as well, since 48 students (85% of those surveyed) reported faculty interaction as a source of motivation. What also seemed to radiate from
this theme within Case 1 was a sub-theme of connectivity. This trait further defined and
clarified the theme of Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation, but it also displayed
a form of emotional support that students received from the faculty member.

In their own way, the students within Case 1 noted that the faculty member supported
them. He made them feel accepted or at a minimum made them feel capable and wanted.
The faculty member’s interaction with them somehow made the students feel needed and
deserving of attention, and indeed instruction. The faculty member’s interaction with them
caused students to engage. The faculty member’s interaction gave the students motivation.
In Hector’s words, “the teacher also gives you the motivation to come.”

With Case 1, the data revealed more than cursory interaction between the faculty
member and students as it relates to coursework. The students relayed emotional support
a connection that was forged between faculty and student. In the students’ words, “the
connection comes from being valued as a student” (Hector).

**Other sources of motivation.** Other Sources of Motivation was another theme
that emerged during the research. In Case 1, the impetus for motivation varied, but some
students were clear that their motivation came from within. For example, Sara stated:

The first thing is the writing center they recommend and I go. I keep going and
do better each time. And some students don’t go and don’t go to class and come
and go. People come back and forth with a lot of absences coming and going and
they have to try to catch up and a lot of stuff falls behind.

Here, Sara was expressing her own motivation and desire to perform well as a
student. She demonstrated self-motivation to go to the writing center and to attend class.

When asked what traits would you associate with someone who is successful with
accelerated developmental writing she noted:

Sara: What do you mean?

Interviewer: What type of things does an accelerated writing student do to be successful? What would you say that was?

Sara: Keep practice. I keep practice when I go to the class and I get the help from the writing center. I keep trying. I go. I not the good at it, but I keep practice. I give the effort.

From the students’ perspectives, self-motivation is demonstrated by their effort to go to class, to practice assignments, to try, and to complete work: “I show up for every class. I need to pass” (Dominique).

Other students in Case 1 expressed the motivation to succeed in their accelerated developmental writing course, but the motivation did not come entirely from within. Dominique said:

It’s hard to sit in this type of class. Not college right? Do I get credit for this? My parents are working so hard but I don’t feel ready sometimes. Umm…I am doing everything I can, but its really hard. You know? There is no more money to try again. They gave me everything to help me get here.

Dominique wanted to do better for herself, yes, but she was also motivated to do well to please her family. Her words emphasized the need to do well and not waste her parents’ money. Dominique’s voice here stressed the importance of hard work and persistence, as well as the importance of the course being accelerated. While she does not state this specifically, the statement about not wasting her parents’ money suggests that Dominique was aware of the effects of the developmental maze and how developmental
classes could waste time and money, if you failed to move through them quickly. She wanted to get through this course and move on to college-level work and completion. Dominique understood that she needed to finish the course and perform well.

Dominique was not alone in being motivated by the accelerated pace of the course. Hector commented: “This course is good like this. I want to get it done. I am glad I am taking it now. It used to be like four classes, right?” The accelerated nature of the course is appealing and a motivation for students to do well and complete. Another student noted that “I know this is two classes together, but I don’t know which is better? I didn’t have the other one. I know I only paid for one class, so that is good” (Fatima).

Given the two different sources of motivation for Case 1, there was no clear indication from the students’ responses that one source of motivation was better than the other. The survey data had approximately three-quarters of the students surveyed note that other sources of motivation were a factor in their success in accelerated developmental writing. The survey data were general without a particular source of motivation as being more instrumental than another. What seemed to matter most for Case 1 as it related to other sources of motivation was that the students were motivated by self, family, or acceleration to succeed.

**Academic support from the institution.** At Darrow Community College, academic support from the institution can come from the Academic Success Center, which houses the Writing Center or from Tutorial Services. None of these services were a part of the class itself, but students were encouraged to attend for additional help with writing and grammar. Faculty assigned a small portion of the students’ grades to writing center attendance.
Case 1 did not value Academic Support from the institution as widely as Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation or Other Sources of Motivation, yet this theme emerged nonetheless. Only 46% of students surveyed noted academic support from the institution. Case 1 students identified the writing center, housed within the academic success center, as an aid to their success in accelerated developmental writing. The interview data revealed that students believed academic support from the institution aided their success: “The first thing is the writing center. They recommend and I go. I get help and my papers are better.” (Sara) Thus, students in Case 1 experienced producing better work after going for academic support from the institution.

When asked about traits of a successful student, Genie said, “I guess they go to the writing tutor. I don’t.” It is unclear from Genie’s response why she does not go the writing tutor, but we can draw a few conclusions from her response. She does not go to the writing tutor. She believes successful students go to the writing tutor. She believes that because she does not go to the writing tutor and successful students do, she is not experiencing success in the course. Genie was one of two students within the research study who failed the accelerated developmental writing course.

Other students reported not going to the writing center because they were busy. In Dominique’s words, “I don’t even go to the tutor thing. I don’t have time with work and my son and everything else.” Dominique’s response is interesting because it suggests that students may not take advantage of academic support from the institution because they are not able to. This may also be why less than half of the students surveyed had an opinion about academic support from the institution. They were simply unable to attend or participate in these services.
From the Case 1 interviews, it seemed that the students were aware of the academic support the college offered them as it related to their accelerated developmental writing course. There is no consensus as to why more students did not seek help and utilize this service. Although they value the writing center, some chose not to take advantage of the service.

**Absence of peer support.** Within this case there was an absence of peer support. This meant students did not engage or interact with one another. Therefore, Case 1 did not consider peer support to be a contributing factor for success in an accelerated developmental writing course. Case 1 students reported:

I don’t really talk to them. We have class together, but everyone is doing their own thing (Dominique)

The other students aren’t all young and dumb. I guess they messed up somewhere too. We are all older in this class I guess and need help (Genie)

It’s a quiet class (Hector).

Not only was there no evidence of students helping each other, there was no interaction among students in class. This group of students valued the interaction with the professor and with academic support from the institution more than any peer involvement. This absence of peer support was apparent in survey results as well. Only 18 of the students surveyed identified peer support as helpful within their accelerated developmental writing course.

The same data could also be viewed as peer support being significantly present in Case 1. Case 1 students believed the students in their course were like them. They lacked skills, smarts, and college-readiness, equally. They were not able to learn anything from
one another, because they were all in the accelerated developmental writing course together. From this vantage point, Case 1 students found little utility in collaborative assignments and peer work. However, there was a kindred bond of unity in the fact that they all “messed up somewhere.”

Absence of college preparation and planning. Approximately 66% of students surveyed noted the absence of college preparation and planning as a hindrance to their success in the accelerated developmental writing course. The interview data also revealed the absence of college preparation and planning as a theme.

Specifically, students in Case 1 commented about negative high school or pre-college academic experiences they had that resulted in their developmental placement. One student, Genie, stated, “My high school wasn’t the best.” Like other students within this particular case, Genie realized that her college preparation and planning impacted her college performance. With the statement above, she suggests that her high school did not provide adequate preparation for college.

Another student, Fatima, expressed similar feelings. “It has been a rough journey and I have actually had my high school experience and middle school experience be bad too.” What was implied in Fatima’s statement was that now her college experience, was not a good experience either. However, like the other students in Case 1, Fatima was dealing with it. “I am not happy I am in this class. I feel like it is another setback. I gotta suck it up and do the work. I have to get through it.”

While being honest about their pre-collegiate shortfalls, Genie and Fatima were also honest about what they perceived as their personal deficiencies. For example, Genie said, “I could have done better in high school, but I liked to party and drink and that led
to drugs.” Similarly, Fatima expressed:

My personal experience has affected me in a good way because it has definitely made me a stronger person. I feel like without the struggles I’ve been through in my life I wouldn’t be the person I am today and with a good head on my shoulders and the right mindset. And this is what I want to succeed and go to college. That means this course. It has been a rough journey. I made bad decisions and I am in this class now. I am glad for the bad decisions though; it made me who I am.

Case 1 students demonstrated maturity in understanding that, irrespective of their rough start and bad decisions leading up to college, they made it through the doors of college and into the accelerated developmental writing course. It was now up to them to succeed.

**Curriculum support.** Students in Case 1 mentioned the course structure and curriculum materials as an aid to student success in the accelerated developmental writing course. Sara stated that,

The concepts of writing are good. Like the very first one in developmental writing, it was five different types of essays. It was put together like 1,2,3. You don’t see until you are finish. But it built up to help you get better [with] each essay. So I have learned narrative, like cause and effect, and compare and contrast. The instructor helped me each time. Each time there was more learning from the essays and the readings. Each one helped.

Thus, Sara articulated having a positive response to the curriculum. She also expressed how the structure of the curriculum materials supported her learning. By
recalling the sequence of essays, Sara was identifying a deliberate pedagogical concept of scaffolding assignments within the curriculum. She responded positively to this form of ordering the assignments. Hector had a similar experience:

   Everything in the online for each week supported what we were doing in class. If you didn’t understand the class, the online would help you get through it. You could never be lost, because the online was there to get you back. I think that’s why we had the information, to help us when we were not at school or with the professor.

   The students in Case 1 were aware of the scaffolding of curriculum within the accelerated developmental writing course. They acknowledged that it helped them remain engaged and helped them to feel supported

   There was no survey data that revealed curriculum support as a theme.

**Case 2**

Like Case 1, Case 2 comprised a group of students from Darrow Community College. The class met during the Spring 2015 term during the day. This group was also racially and ethnically diverse. However, a majority of the students in Case 2 were non-native speakers. Out of the five non-native speakers, three were extremely difficult to interview. Given the language barriers, it was necessary to restate questions multiple times in an attempt to ascertain comprehension. I also noted observations more specifically in these interviews, as there was little speaking to record or follow. The observations helped me gain further clarity and understanding with regard to the students’ actual emotions, whether they were stated or not. Below is a table of themes that emerged when interviewing Case 2.
Table 4

Student Demographic and Theme Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanjay</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravni</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasha</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation, Curriculum, Peer Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonita</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Peer Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Peer Support, Other Sources of Motivation, Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation, Peer Support, Other Sources of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valjeep</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faculty interaction as a source of motivation. Much like the students in Case 1, this group of students emphasized the faculty member’s role in their academic persistence within the accelerated developmental writing course. This is no surprise since 85% of students surveyed also emphasized faculty interaction as a source of motivation. Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation was defined as any point of interaction from faculty to student or student to faculty.

In Ravni’s words, “This class writing. I go to the college to write and learn the English. The teacher help me do the writing work.” Sanjay stated that “I am in the college and the class writing a lot with teacher help. I like teacher. A good man. Class
hard. He make class good for me” Marilyn also reported, “I can speak to the teacher every class. It is helpful.”

For students within this case, the demeanor and attitude of the faculty member helped them engage in the course. Their responses indicated that they engaged in writing and the class because of the professor. Jessica said, “He made class good for me.” This engagement was one of the reasons why they were able to persist and continue with the course. They continued to attend class, and therefore do work, because the teacher helped them. Sanjay said, “I go to the class and get the help.” This is particularly true of the non-native speakers in the case. Their body language, facial expressions, and overall demeanor conveyed at varying points during the interview, a sense of relief, happiness, calm, and joy, when speaking about the teacher.

For example, Sanjay and Ravni smiled, a sign of happiness, when speaking of the professor. Jonita offered that

I have always loved to write. Poems. Little stories. Letters. I mean this makes me love it more because the professor is good. He likes my writing. It makes me feel like I am good at it.

Jonita presented as calm, but also joyful. She was proud of her writing and appreciative for the help from the faculty member. She expressed enjoying writing more because the faculty member thought she was a good writer. The added layer of someone else, an authority, thinking of her writing as “good,” was inspiring. “It helped me to hear what he thought about what I am doing. Makes me think about how I can improve.”

Students like Sanjay, Ravni, and Valjeep, who did not have a good command of the English language, smiled a lot. I observed smiles and other amicable body language
when they would speak about or refer to the professor. Despite not having the words to express themselves more clearly, the message of the faculty member as a source of motivation was present. The climate the professor created in the classroom contributed to student success in accelerated developmental writing courses.

One student, Pasha, who spoke English well, stated:

I love this class. It is not too big. Not too small. We get to talk to the professor and each other every class. The class is long enough so we have time to do some work on the computers. This is my favorite class. I am taking math and this. (Smiles) Maybe I don’t like Math. Joking. But I don’t. No, seriously, this is a good course.

In just a few sentences, Pasha was able to communicate the importance of the teacher and her fellow classmates within the context of her accelerated developmental writing course. She liked that she had an opportunity to speak with the faculty member and her peers each week. It is a positive interaction. “This is the only class I actually want to come to” she said.

The students in Cases 1 and 2 articulated the emotional support of faculty members that motivated them. Their academic behaviour changed as a result of this motivation, but their mindset also changed. The faculty interaction made them believe in self and personal ability. The students’ mindsets apparently changed from who they were to what they could be. The students experienced a mental migration from outcast to a sense of I can do it feeling that college success was possible for them. Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation was intimately intertwined with the shift in mindset. Faculty members provided emotional support that encouraged the students and inspired them to
succeed. The emotional support also caused the students to have confidence and to believe in self.

Jonita clearly indicated that she likes writing even more because the professor has motivated her. The positive reinforcement she received from the professor gave her the will to continue to write and persist in this course. Case 2 students expressed this feeling over and over again. The students in Case 2 consistently conveyed a warm and genuine respect for their teacher above that expressed by Case 1. The students within Case 2 seem to express gratitude.

**Other sources of motivation.** Case 2 demonstrated that the students received the motivation to persist in the accelerated developmental writing course from various sources. Pasha stated:

I learned to speak English first and all my family speaks English. But I am not a good writer. I am getting more practice and getting better. I just show up to class every day and do everything the professor says. You have to do everything, I think. Because I am getting better.

While not stating anything about self-motivation specifically, Pasha clearly demonstrated behaviour such as showing up for class every day, displaying her inner motivation to succeed and do what was required. Other students within Case 2 also shared this sentiment. When asked about her experience with the accelerated developmental writing course, Jessica said:

The class was excellent. Wonderful. My interaction with the professor and students has been wonderful. I feel I’m learning and that’s what I want. That’s what the college and the class do for me.
It was clear that Jessica had a positive experience with her accelerated developmental writing course. She found the teacher to be helpful and “wonderful.” However, she also illustrates, with her words, her personal work ethic and motivation. She calls it “self-regulation.”

Interviewer: And what do you think fuels your learning? What fuels that feeling that I am learning?

Jessica: The energy in me.

Interviewer: Good. Is it fair to call that energy motivation?

Jessica: Yes, it’s self-regulation.

The findings as it relates to other sources of motivation, came through clearly in the interviews with Case 2. This data aligned with the survey data, in that some 42 students (75% of those surveyed) cited other sources of motivation as a success indicator for accelerated developmental writing courses. The survey simple relayed “other sources of motivation” however, the interview data helped to distinguish the source of motivation for students within Case 2 as self-motivation.

**Peer support.** This theme presented in Case 2 most directly, meaning the students interacted with their peers more in this group, but also recognized and valued them as resources. For instance, Pasha said, “I know I will talk to my friends” but she did not speak of her family or outside obligations. Her interview focused solely on her love for school and this class. She stated that she thought she would place right into an English class, but did not. She overcame disappointment by engaging with her peers “Other students thought they should be in regular English too, but we all worked together. It made class not so bad” (Pasha)
This was a significant statement coming from someone who placed into an accelerated developmental writing course. Whether the placement into English materialized at the end of the course or not, the students in Case 2 overcame a negative mental state by working with their peers. Working with peers made the students feel that they were not in this alone and that their placement was not permanent.

Maria reported being apprehensive about the course initially, but ultimately she came to rely on her fellow classmates:

At first I was nervous. I didn’t know what to expect and didn’t know what to do, but then I started to feel better. I talked to the professor and I talked to other students. Everyone was nervous and just learning like me. I was scared, but I finally asked people for help. I talked to people in class and the teacher. It helped me feel okay to do the work. So I started doing the reading and writing work together and then I was learning. Like making progress. It was good.

Once Maria took time to engage with her peers, she was able to dispel feelings of inadequacy and isolation “I felt nervous. I am not good with school and didn’t want to be like slow or last.” In speaking with her peers, Maria became aware that her feelings were not odd, unique, or uncommon. Breaking through this barrier was a critical shift in her mindset toward the course, since she “started doing the work” after she began speaking with her peers.

Jessica’s interaction with her peers within Case 2 helped to crystallize the theme of peer support as an external motivation to student success in accelerated developmental writing courses. Jessica stated: “I learn from them. I get feedback from them. They help me keep going. We are all here together.” The “them” Jessica refers to are her peers. In
her words, they provide support that she values. From Jessica’s account, it was not enough to be in the class and listen to the teacher she engaged in the course through her peers as well. Peers provided the external motivation to succeed and actually do the work.

The theme of peer support, as expressed by Case 2, was moderately supported by the survey data. While not in large proportions, 32% of students surveyed identified peer support as a success indicator.

**Curriculum.** Curriculum did not emerge as a theme at all in the survey data. In the interview data, curriculum content did emerge as a theme, but as a barrier to success. Specifically, the reading materials presented problems for this case of students as indicated by interviews such as Sanjay’s who reported that, “The read book is hard. It takes a lot of time. I don’t know.” Jonita: said that, “I like to write, but the reading we do is more than I did in high school. I don’t know a lot of the words. The teacher helps a lot with what we read because I don’t think anybody gets it.”

Both the native and non-native speakers reported having problems with the reading material in the course, but the writing content was easier for the students to follow. For example, Jessica reported that the writing homework was always basic. “Like it made sense. You wrote a compare and contrast essay or like argument. And it made sense. The readings were the hardest part of the class for me.”

**Case 3**

The third case of students was from Bow Community College. These students were placed in an accelerated developmental writing course upon entry to the college. The class met during the day during Spring 2015. Traditional college-aged students,
eighteen and nineteen years old, were interviewed. The case included three Caucasian students, two girls and one boy. Initially, seven students were scheduled for interviews, but, on the day interviewing took place, only three students arrived to participate. Below is the table of themes that emerged during the interviews with students in Case 3.

**Table 5**

*Case 3 Demographic and Theme Identification*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
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<td>Heather</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Academic Support, from the Institution, Peer Support, Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>College Preparation &amp; Planning, Curriculum, Peer Support, Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Faculty Interaction A Source of Motivation, Curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faculty interaction as a source of motivation.** The theme of Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation also emerged in Case 3. Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation was defined as any point of intersection from faculty to student or student to faculty. Heather notes, My teacher is nice. You can make an appointment with her or just stay after class. She is always there to read a paper or talk about essays we read.

Similarly, Josh said:

I feel like I can get help from my teacher, I just have a hectic schedule. It’s not her
fault. I play sports and it gets busy sometimes. I get a little lost on where we are or where we were last. If I have time, I ask her and she helps me out. She’s good like that. I like the one-on-one help I get from her. Sometimes you don’t understand everything when she is talking, but it was good to be able to speak with her.

Megan reported, “Ms. Anders took time in class and outside of class. I got help with my papers. It was easy to talk to her at anytime.”

Just like students in Cases 1 and 2, the students in Case 3 recognized the faculty member as friendly, helpful, and available. This was consistent with survey results. The students within this case expressed appreciation, in that the faculty member was readily available to help them. Heather stated, “I appreciate the course setup and delivery. It is very clear, so the professor did that.” The students’ voices were clear. They valued the faculty member as the one who instructs them. Though the faculty member’s emphasis shifts, the need for faculty to support students remains.

Differing from Cases 1 and 2, Case 3 seems to rely less on the faculty interaction for motivation, but rather they place emphasis on the faculty member for teaching materials and instruction. Josh said, “When I asked for help, she gave me the regular work plus extra work.” Whether through implication or direct statement, each student in Case 3 recognized the role of faculty member as an information authority who was accessible. This is very different than the faculty who was a motivator and emotionally supportive in Cases 1 and 2.

**College preparation and planning.** This theme emerged in two of the student interviews in Case 3. Heather said,

At first I was confused about being in the class. I did really well in high school.
My classes weren’t honors, but I did do well in them. They said I missed the test here by like two points. I don’t know how you get all As in high school classes and do developmental at college. This class is different though. Not like what I did in high school. We read here and write a lot more. We wrote five paragraph essays in high school. Like twice.

Heather’s comments were interesting because while she recognized the difference between her high school work and the work she completed for college, she was unable to reconcile grading scales and workloads from the two institutions. Her comments speak to the gap between high school and college work. Specifically, she speaks about the grade disparity and how to make sense of earning all As in high school, but still matriculating into a developmental course once in college: “I received good [grades] in high school only to find myself in a developmental course in college.”

Some students reported a lack of connection between high school expectations and assignments, and those they faced in their accelerated developmental writing course. For example, Maria said, “This is no longer the five paragraph essay. There is a lot more work here than we did in high school.” Whether increased workload or simply being shocked by the initial developmental placement, students in Case 3 had a definite opinion about college preparation and planning not preparing them adequately for the college experience.

**Support**

**Peer support.** Students were consistent with feedback about peer support. It was clear from the data presented in this study that group work and collaborative activities were built into the accelerated developmental writing courses. These activities fostered
peer support within Case 3. In his or her own words, each student from Case 3 had something to add about peer support.

Megan said, “I enjoy the peer review days. It helps you see what other people are doing and where you fit. Sometimes my classmate’s paper is better than mine and sometimes mine is better than theirs.” Heather stated, “We do group work and that helps me too. I like talking to the other students. Sometimes they have good ideas or think something different than I do. It helps me understand.” Josh added: “The partner exchange with papers is good when I am here. Sometimes I miss it. I read someone’s paper and they read mine and we talk about it. It is a good process.”

So all of the students within this case found utility in the practice of peer review or other forms of group work.

**Academic support from the institution.** Academic Support from the Institution emerged as students relaid positive experiences with the writing center on campus. Megan said, “I like the writing center and make lots of appointments for help. You can get help by yourself there. You can make as many appointments as you want.” Heather added, “The writing center is a good resource. Sometimes it is very busy, but it is worth waiting. You get help with your papers one-on-one.”

Megan and Heather highlight the writing center as an aid to student success in an accelerated developmental writing course. Megan’s words also express that she uses the writing center frequently. She sees a benefit from it, but also attributes it to one of the reasons students should be successful in accelerated developmental writing courses. As Megan said, “There is no reason to fail this course. You have so much help. Go to the writing center or just ask the teacher. Everyone wants to help you.”
Overall Case 3 expressed relational qualities with the faculty member, the institution, and one another when relaying their experiences with the accelerated developmental writing course. Each of these encounters had a positive effect on Case 3 students and contributed positively to their performance in the course.

Case 4

Case 4 contained only one student. Due to difficulties with arranging interviews at this site, the seven students that were supposed to be available for interviews were not. While not ideal, it was important to continue the course and interview the student who was prepared for the interview. Moreover, since the research is concerned with students’ voices, there is no one voice that is more important than another. Finally, since qualitative research is concerned with data saturation and not numerical values of the number of people interviewed, I felt confident about the information collected as data were falling into the same thematic groupings.

Suzie attended a day section of accelerated developmental writing at Bow. Like the students in Case 3, Suzie fell into the category of traditional college age since she is nineteen. Below is the summary of data collected from Suzie.

Table 6

Case 4 Demographic and Theme Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suzie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Peer Support, Curriculum, Faculty Interaction, A Source of Motivation, Academic Support from the Institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suzie was a pleasure to interview. She presented as confident and really enjoyed the class. Suzie relayed:

I didn’t know what to expect from this course, but I liked it. I was confused about how everything would work, with the two classes meeting at different times. It helped to have my friends in the class. We were so happy to get the same days and times. We ride to school together. We always do everything together. We went to high school together. I didn’t think this class would work or I would figure it out. But it has worked well. With my friends it works well. They understand more and help me. It worked well to have the one class meet before the other to like review the work. It also helped to have the same teacher for both and the center reviews your papers.

Without using the exact words, Suzie spoke of benefitting from peer support, curriculum structure, academic support from the institution, and faculty interaction. Suzie admitted to being confused, but riding to and from school with friends and attending class with friends helped her. In her words, she went from confusion to the class “working well,” and this seems to be largely due to her peers.

She also acknowledged the curriculum structure. She liked having time to review work from the composition class in the developmental course. Again, without using all of the technical terms, Suzie noted that the scaffolding of coursework was an effective tool in gaining understanding. Suzie also stated that she took advantage of the writing center for further input and guidance on her assignments. From Suzie’s perspective, it seems that engagement with peers, curriculum, and academic support from the institution were critical to her success in the course.
Suzie did state that having the same faculty member teach both courses was helpful. While I noted this for faculty interaction, it is not the same type of faculty interaction described in Cases 1 and 2, where there is an emotional quality inherent to the description the students’ provide. Here Suzie seemed to like the simplicity and uniformity that one teacher offers: “If you forgot to ask her something, you could just ask on Wednesday. It was the same person.”

*Figure 3.* Emerged themes impacting student success

Summarizing the individual cases, several themes emerge however, when converged with the data obtained from the student survey, the themes above emerge as vital to student success in an accelerated developmental writing course.
Cross-Case Analysis

Stake has cross-case analysis procedures: (a) emphasizing case findings, (b) merging case findings, and (c) providing factors for analysis. This study applied the merging case findings procedure where the emphasis is on combining the findings across cases. Using this method, I was able to identify five emergent themes that were consistent across the four cases studied.

Finding 1: faculty interaction as a source of motivation is critical to student success. The interaction between the professor and the student proved to leave a lasting impression on almost all of the students within this study. Eighty-five percent of the student surveys support this finding, as do case interview data. Across the four cases, nineteen (19) students, more than half, had a positive opinion about the professors’ impact on their course performance. The student interviews provided a greater explanation of what Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation meant to them.

A more in-depth analysis of the data collected from surveys, interviews, and observations help to further define faculty interaction as a source of motivation. The cases seem to break clearly in halves. Half of the cases, Cases 1 and 2, view faculty interaction as a source of motivation as emotional and academic support. The other half, Cases 3 and 4, view faculty interaction as a source of motivation as pure academic support.

Interestingly enough, this line of demarcation is clearly defined by school. The cases of students at Darrow expressed a wealth of emotional support coming from their instructors, in addition to the academic support received. Darrow students needed extra emotional confidence and received it from their interaction with the faculty member:

“My teacher makes me feel smart.”
“My teacher is nice and supportive.”

“I felt like I could do the work for the first time in school.”

“My teacher didn’t make me feel stupid.”

“I didn’t feel stupid in this class. Actually, I felt smart.”

“My teacher helped me feel like I could do it.” (Student Interviews, 2015)

For these students the teacher’s classroom demeanor, personal support, and general interactions with them seemed to foster a motivational climate that caused students to be active, to participate, and to learn. Darrow students needed faculty members who listened, encouraged, and believed in them. The Darrow students who were a part of this study came from a lower economic demographic and had a higher concentration of ethnic minorities than Bow.

Bow students also spoke about the faculty member as being helpful and available, but the faculty member’s helpfulness and availability was related to schoolwork only. The Bow students are from a wealthier demographic than Darrow students and all Bow students were white. Bow students talked about the faculty member supporting them in terms of actual curriculum, instruction, and instructional support. For example, Bow students spoke about how the faculty members really explained the material well and gave clear instructions that were easy to understand.

This finding was interesting because I expected the demographic to be developmental and non-developmental. I thought all students would have similar feelings and emotions, and thus relay similar stories because they were all developmental students. However, the research demonstrates that all developmental student populations are not the same. In fact, different developmental populations will require very different
instruction and instructional support.

Finding 2: students’ success in accelerated developmental writing courses is tied to support, whether academic support from the institution, peer support, or familial support. According to survey data, forty-six percent of the students reported academic support from the institution as aiding student success. As stated in student interviews, Darrow students discussed the academic support from the institution was relayed as both literal academic support but also emotional support. Students talked about help they received on papers and the ability to walk into the writing center and just talk to a tutor. Cases 1 and 2 looked for and found more emotional support. Yes, they needed academic help, but they were needed emotionally support too. They looked to their respective faculty member for support first, but also to academic support from the institution to provide this support.

Bow students looked to academic support from the institution to provide academic expertise. The Bow students went to the writing center to receive help with the actual work of the course. Unlike Darrow students, who occasionally went to the writing center to see a friendly face or to receive positive reinforcement, Bow students used academic support from the institution for assignments only.

About thirty-two percent of students surveyed commented about peer support. The interview data revealed that Case 1 did not express peer support in a traditional sense. In fact, given a quick glance of the data, it would seem peer support is not present because students did not see a benefit in collaborative work efforts within the course. However, being in a class with other developmental students provided the students with a shared knowing that they were not alone as the “dumb” kids. Case 2 students shared Case 1’s
experience, in that they were not alone as developmental students. The data from Cases 1 and 2, the Darrow students, articulates more clearly a description of peer support that is focused on a sense of belonging. Darrow students felt supported by peers who shared their academic struggles. The sense of not being alone helped students in Cases 1 and 2 move forward and try.

Bow students felt supported academically and socially by their peers. They enjoyed socializing in and out of class with them and valued the feedback they received during collaborative classroom activities. Bow students looked at their peers as being capable, just like them. In their view, their peers were wronged, as they were, when placed in the developmental course.

About 51% of students surveyed commented on familial support. This aligns with interview data since familial support was reported by all cases, but differently. For Darrow students, familial support was specific and reflective of the enormous financial sacrifice their families made to ensure they could attend college. Bow students did not discuss familial support specifically, but there was an unspoken presumption of familial support. Bow students were expected to go to college and their parents were expected to pay for it.

**Finding 3 students are aware of their lack of college planning and preparation and how it has impacted their college placement.** Students expressed feelings of confusion and frustration with regard to their placement in an accelerated developmental writing course. In fact, sixty-one percent of students surveyed, commented on their lack of college planning and preparation. For Darrow students, there was an acknowledgement that they did not prepare for college in the right way, or in the converse, that their preparation from the prior institution was just not adequate. Bow
students were able to process and discuss the limitations of their pre-college experiences and how they impacted their current developmental placement.

For Bow students, there was more of a disbelief and shock as to why they were placed in developmental accelerated writing courses since they were “good” students in high school. Collectively, Bow students spoke about doing well or good in high school. For example, Josh said, “I was surprised to be in this class. I was A/B in high school.” Suzie stated: “I was a B student in high school so surprise, surprise to be in the pre-classes. My parents were mad too.” The fact that Darrow students were shocked at their developmental placement, underscores an odd sense of entitlement or overconfidence on their behalf. Where the Darrow students expect to be ill prepared, as they had been for most of their lives, the Bow students expected to be ready. After all, they have always measured up.

It was hard for Bow students to reconcile their positive high school experiences and good grades with the developmental placement. Darrow students could relate to the accelerated developmental writing placement because their prior academic experiences were not good. What Darrow students and Bow students share, is an awareness about their high school experiences being different from their college experience. For Darrow students, the experience was different because the accelerated developmental writing course was challenging them academically, while providing necessary support. For the Bow students the experience was different because this was the first time they were not on or above level.
Chapter 5

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore accelerated developmental writing courses to determine, from the students’ perspectives, if and why accelerated writing courses are successful. Sixty-eight percent of community college students require at least some developmental education (Jaggars & Stacey, 2014). Research suggests that students in accelerated programs are more likely to enroll in gatekeeper courses and are as likely to pass (Jaggars & Stacey, 2014). What is not known is why, from the students’ perspectives, they are more likely to pass an accelerated developmental writing course. The study was necessary to add the students’ voices to the growing discourse about accelerated developmental writing courses.

The sections below will answer the research questions of this study and discuss implications for policy practice and future research.

RQ#1 How Does an Accelerated Developmental Writing Course Promote or Achieve Student Success?

My cross case analysis resulted in three findings, two of which help us understand how accelerated developmental writing courses help students be successful. From the data collected, one of the reasons that accelerated developmental writing courses achieve student success is because of the faculty members’ interaction with the students. For both, Darrow and Bow Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation mattered, but it mattered differently.

The students at Darrow voiced Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation from the perspective of emotional need and well-being. The students within the
Darrow cases, Cases 1 and 2, needed confidence and encouragement. The faculty member provided this for them and helped them. The faculty member listened to them, encouraged them, and believed in them. Students in the Darrow cases explained how the emotional encouragement from faculty helped them to overcome the stigma of developmental placement, but also to overcome a lifetime of being counted out.

Viewed from a deficit perspective, the Darrow students who might be framed as students who were lacking in some way. Their knowledge and experiences had been marginalized and perceived negatively because of their race or situation (Dudley-Marling, 2012). Darrow students shared past drug addictions, financial struggles, and poor academic preparation. As such, education has never shown these students that they mattered. Within the Darrow cases there was a larger percentage of racial minorities than Bow, and the economic demographic was much lower than Bow. The median income for Darrow’s service area at the time of this study was $49,062 per household while Bow’s service area had a median household income of $84,746.00.

Darrow students previously had adverse or negative school experiences. These students were barely able to appreciate and value themselves as students. They have not had the support academically or the resources financially or otherwise to prepare them to be successful in an academic setting. Darrow students reported family members working hard to help them pay for community college. They expressed frustration for being in a class with other “messed up” students. Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation provided these students with a positive academic experience. The accelerated developmental writing courses made them feel capable and able because of Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation. Darrow students were able to take the emotional
support from faculty members to gain confidence. This confidence helped them to achieve academic success despite deficits.

For Bow students in this study, Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation was not about emotional support: instead it was demonstrated through clear instructions, curriculum design, and class structure. Bow students appreciated their teacher and their teacher contributed to their success. The teacher gave them the actual materials and information they needed to be successful in the class. Bow students already felt good about who they were in life and what they were capable of achieving. They took great pride in the fact that they were A/B students. For them, the developmental placement was a nuisance that they needed a road map to get through. In their words, the faculty member provided this map by providing assignments they could understand, explaining material well, and being clear.

Bow students do not seem to internalize a sense of failure at being in a developmental writing course. For them, it is a nuisance and a mistake. This is in contrast to Darrow students who saw themselves as failures for being in the course. For the Darrow students, the course represented a valuable opportunity to learn and progress more rapidly to college-level coursework. Research supports this notion, in that students are more likely to persist and achieve college success through acceleration (Edgecombe, 2011). It decreases the amount of time the student is in developmental education and provides a lower possibility of exit (Edgecombe, 2011). The Bow students viewed the class as another “thing” they were made to do. The accelerated developmental writing course was not something they needed, because they already earned “good grades” in high school.
Students at both colleges also noted other sources of motivation as contributing to their success in accelerated developmental writing courses. Both Darrow and Bow students in the study noted peer support, but again, they noted it differently. For Darrow students, there was an absence of peer support because the students did not see the utility in collaboration when the other students were “equally dumb.” Despite this fact, there was a notion of not being in the negative space, the developmental placement alone. Prior to being in the accelerated developmental writing course, Darrow students experienced feeling inadequate in isolation. But now the accelerated developmental writing course brought them into contact with other students who had similar challenges. They did not look to these peers as being able to help them, but the existence of their peers did help their emotional wellness. Overall, the existence of other students like them meant they were not an oddity or the lone student with a developmental placement.

For Bow students, peer support was discussed as being fully engaged in the collaborative work of the class. Bow students valued exchanging papers and meeting in groups. However, like Darrow students, they also experienced an emotional benefit from peer support. The Bow students were socially connected with their peers. They rode to school together and shared one another’s company outside of the class.

These differences in how Darrow and Bow students viewed and valued peer support suggest that deficit perspective may be internalized. Research in externalizing, internalizing, and academic competence show that high levels of internalizing problems are associated with low academic performance (Moilanen, K., Shaw, D., & Maxwell, K., 2010). Specifically, the literature states that initial failures in academic functioning instigate the development of internalizing symptoms (Moilanen, et. al., 2010). One of
the many symptoms of internalizing is being withdrawn. Thus, students are less likely to engage in collaborative activities if they have internalized their negative academic and life experiences to date. This helps explain why Darrow students did not value the interaction or feedback of their peers whereas Bow students did. The way others viewed them had a significant impact on Darrow students. They internalized the negative viewpoints of others, and it diminished their confidence and ability to succeed. Bow students had positive prior life and academic experiences, so they responded differently.

RQ#2 What are the Central Components of Accelerated Developmental Writing Courses that Contribute to Student Success?

In addition to the components of faculty and peer support, two other components contributed to student success: time and structure. Time is an essential component of the accelerated developmental writing course that contributes to student success. Students did not state this overtly, however, it was clear that the compressed timeframe of the course mattered to them. The students in Cases 1 & 2 made many references to completion. The students described an urgency to push through and complete the course now. They needed to finish because they did not want to waste more time.

Darrow students felt like this especially since they experienced so many challenges during their academic journeys. The accelerated developmental writing course helped them to begin to see themselves as capable of academic success. For the first time these students had hope because there was still enough time to catch up. Having “two classes in one” was better. This renewed hope that they would persist in their academic journey and be college-ready began with the accelerated developmental writing course.
Bow students also saw the compressed time as an aid to their student success because it kept them on track. Bow students were the A/B students that were inconvenienced by the developmental placement. A majority of students with A and B grade point averages in high school still require developmental education at the community-college level (Zinshteyn, 2016). So for this student population, the urgency to complete the course came from arrogance or a sense of entitlement because - *I don’t belong here anyway*. The compressed time within the course was important for them because “we will still be done with English”.

The study shows that the time component inherent in the structure of the accelerated developmental writing courses contributes to student success. For Bow students it gave them hope. For Darrow students the course placement did no real harm because it did not put them behind. The compressed time for accelerated developmental writing courses encouraged students to persist and provided a certain end to developmental coursework.

There was no distinction in data collected from Bow and Darrow about course curriculum. The course curriculum in accelerated developmental writing courses contributed to success. This theme emerged in all four cases. Students like structure. The students at Darrow and Bow both appreciated the structure of their courses. For Darrow students, they discussed this in terms of how readings were reinforced by writing assignments. Darrow students also commented about materials being available online for further review and study. For Bow students, the discussion focused on how one class reinforced the other. Bow had the co-requisite model where the accelerated developmental writing course was paired with freshman composition. Students liked
being able to have two classroom opportunities to address classwork, homework, or other course related concerns.

The students’ voices align with the literature, because developmental education has been criticized for poor design (Vedder, 2013). The fact that the students’ reinforce the structure of the accelerated developmental writing courses as helpful emphasizes the importance of not only continuing these courses, but also ensuring that they have a deliberate design sequence. Whether co-requisites, multiple class meetings, or scaffolding assignments, students valued the structure and it contributed to their success.

The literature supports the intentionality of the course design (Edgecombe, Jaggar, Xu & Barragan, 2014). Recent studies have found that providing students with the information and skills they need, while exposing them to the expectations of more challenging college-level course work, is a more effective developmental education model (Edgecombe et al, 2014). The design described above outlines the structure of the accelerated developmental writing courses in this study. The courses are designed to integrate lower order writing concerns like grammar and sentence structure with higher order concerns of critical thinking and analysis. The curriculum structure unifies what the student should have known to be college-ready, with what they need to know to be successful in college. The data from students in this study affirm the value of the design and its role in their academic persistence.

**RQ#3 What Traits does the Student Possess that Aids their Success in an Accelerated Developmental Writing Course?**

Motivation and time management skills aid student success in an accelerated developmental writing course. This was stated clearly from the student data
collected. It is the message that is gleaned from the whole of what each case of students relayed.

Students who were persistent and had a resolve to complete the class did, and did well. The mindset, being resolved, took precedence over current or prior perceptions of self and gave the students the impetus to move forward and do. The same mindset also fostered a positive self-perception. It is important to note that the mindset was developed. For example, Darrow students gained motivation from the emotional support from their teachers. The motivation fostered a positive self-perception that enabled them to believe in themselves and succeed.

Instead of viewing the problems the students come to college with, such as a lack of money or parents in the home. This research reveals more malleable traits that the institution help to develop in the students to enhance student success in the area of accelerated developmental education. Institutions can provide strong faculty and other support that will foster student engagement and intrinsic motivation.

The research reports some cases with students that were intrinsically motivated, while other cases of students persisted because of an outside influence or support. This was apparent from students who reported confidence or a resolve from their interactions with faculty, peers, and family. The research in this study indicates that Darrow students were more likely to discuss their family’s support of them. The students were very aware of the sacrifices family members made to help them attend college.

Bow students spoke about peer support, not family, as instrumental in their accelerated developmental writing course experience. They enjoyed social interaction
with peers and peer feedback during classroom collaborative efforts. Both Darrow and Bow students noted faculty support aided their success in the accelerated developmental writing courses.

The research from this study is clear in that motivation plays a large role in student success at the developmental level. For the non-traditional student participants in this study, the Bow students, it seems they arrived with the motivation. They came into the accelerated developmental writing experience with a high level of confidence. They received As and Bs in school, so of course they were prepared to conquer an accelerated developmental writing class. For other students who achieved success in the course, students at Darrow, motivation and confidence were skills they developed along the way. Whether through the experiences within the accelerated developmental writing course, or the initial lessons learned from being a college student, motivation was attained in some students who achieved success. Even those who were not successful were able to identify, “you need to make up your mind to do the work.”

Within some cases, financial support from family was expressed as a necessary component to success in the accelerated developmental writing course. Without the resources from family, their accelerated developmental writing course would not have been a reality. However, the financial support from family, while needed, came with a heavy burden. The burden to perform or succeed seemed to at times be more than some students could bear. This is evidenced in the data from students at Darrow. Having stated that, it is still necessary to address familial financial support as a contributor for success, because many students reported it. For the students it seems that the need for money to attend college, and therefore the accelerated developmental writing course took
precedence over all. From their perspective, family giving their last for them to attend college is all the motivation they needed to see.

Though not expressly stated Bow students received financial support from family as well. The financial support did not result in a hardship for the family, but it was present nonetheless. Bow students had an unspoken expectation of going to college and their parents paying for it. Unlike the data from Darrow students, the data from Bow students does not reflect an overt burden to succeed because of financial support from family. For Bow students, going to college is more like a rite of passage. The difference in how Darrow and Bow students react to their families’ financial support is probably due to the difference in the socioeconomic status of the two student populations. Darrow students are from a poorer demographic than the students from Bow.

The positive perception of self is a characteristic that many students stated as important to success. Students from Darrow discussed their negative self-images and educational experiences and equated them with why they were in a developmental population. “I was always in the dumb classes.” For these same students who were then able to report, “for the first time I felt like I could do it.” There was a clear shift mentally. The Darrow cases contained students that lacked this mentality when entering accelerated developmental writing, but it was a skill they developed during the pendency of the course.

Bow students came with confidence, because their life experiences were different. From their view, they were successful and had been placed illogically, in a course where they did not belong. For them, the accelerated developmental writing course was a nuisance. The college was punishing them and they would get through it because they were capable of doing the work.
Time management skills were expressed as a characteristic that attributed to student success in the accelerated developmental writing course. The Darrow students made statements about work obligations, family commitments, and schoolwork. For the Darrow students there was an awareness of the need to juggle multiple priorities. The students expressed the multiple priorities specifically as a need to provide for family or a need to work. What was not spoken but implied was the need to do those things, but also the need to complete schoolwork in a timely manner. The Darrow students were adapting and learning time management as they went through the accelerated developmental writing course.

The Bow students had a different experience, in that time management was not a dominant theme. Again, these students believed they were ready and capable of college work. They knew how to order their day and manage their time because they were A/B students.

Whether an external motivation to achieve more, or better, or simply the need to complete multiple, important priorities; successful students employed better time management skills. The realities of keeping a job or providing for a family provide great incentive to organize the details of life. For the cases of accelerated developmental writing students within this study, this proved true. They were learning, growing, and succeeding in accelerated, developmental writing courses because they needed to and were inspired to achieve at last. Even in the case of students at Bow, they were succeeding because of the same skills, they simply arrived with them because of their positive cultural experiences with school and life to date.

This research study found that faculty matter. It is very important to make sure the right faculty is member is teaching the right student population. No two groups of
students are the same. With the right faculty member and other support, students are motivated and gain the confidence they need to be successful in an accelerated developmental writing course. The research further revealed that students prefer the compressed timeframe that accelerated developmental courses offer. This feature provides motivation and a defined end – since they know when they will be college-ready.

**Implications for Practice**

There are a few implications to the vastly different responses of Darrow and Bow students. First, community colleges must ensure the right faculty members are teaching accelerated developmental writing courses. This requires knowing the student demographic, and then selecting the faculty who are best situated to meet the students’ needs. Meeting this goal will require more care in scheduling and perhaps even more professional development to ensure faculty are sensitive to the needs of the developmental student population. It is not a homogenous group. This research study suggests that how students respond is dependent upon their prior life and educational experiences.

The research also reveals the need for structure and continuity in accelerated developmental writing courses. Students responded well to course organization (Edgecombe, et al., 2014). It is a long held criticism in the literature on developmental education, that developmental education courses lack structure and organized curriculum content (Higbee & Dwinell, 1996). Increased communication among faculty about developmental education would help endeavours in this area.

In terms of best practices, higher education leaders and faculty must take a
proactive approach to class scheduling and curriculum design. This literature adds the student voice to the discourse on accelerated developmental writing courses. The voice is clear — we are not all the same. Therefore nimbleness is required to augment curriculum and collaborative classroom activities. Faculty in this area must instruct the group of students presently before them.

**Future Research**

My research gave a voice to students. With increased attention to the area of accelerated learning, I thought it was important to examine accelerated developmental writing courses from the students’ perspectives. This small comparative case study suggests three areas for future research that will be explained further in the paragraphs below.

The role of socioeconomic status in accelerated developmental writing courses. Students in this study were either from a higher socioeconomic bracket or a very low one. The data from this study states that the two different student populations experienced the courses differently. The higher socioeconomic status students placed value on academic instruction. The lower socioeconomic status students valued emotional support. A research study designed to specifically review this phenomenon would be beneficial to the discourse on accelerated developmental writing courses.

The emotional impact of faculty on disadvantaged student populations. This study found that students from lower socioeconomic or traditionally marginalized populations valued emotional support from faculty. Future research in this area would be beneficial to community colleges in understanding the faculty-student roles within an accelerated developmental writing course.
Finally, research is needed to probe further into the significant variety of students that place into developmental education. Quantitative studies exist that tell us the number of students and their possible preparation, but this study revealed significant disparities in placement from A/B high students to students with considerable disparities in the ability to speak English.

**Conclusion**

My research found that Faculty Interaction as a Source of Motivation mattered to students. While perceived differently from the cases of students studied, all students within the study needed the faculty member to be successful. Time and course structure helped students achieve success in accelerated developmental writing courses. The students in this case study responded positively to the compressed course sequence that accelerated developmental writing courses offered. Students expressed motivation as a characteristic necessary to success in an accelerated developmental writing course. Thus, by design, the accelerated developmental writing courses are aiding students in becoming more successful.

This study added students’ voices to the discussion of accelerated developmental writing courses. The study adds a perspective to the discourse and will help educators build upon what we know and hopefully help expand our thoughts and practices when addressing this unique student population.
References


Appendix A

Focus Group Worksheet

Code Letter for this Case:

Summary:

Situational Constraints:

Unique Characteristics:

Prominence of themes in this case setting:

Findings:

Expected Utility in developing themes:
### Appendix B

**Ratings of Expected Utility of Each Case for Theme**

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Appendix C

Theme-Based Assertions from Case Findings Rated Important

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Appendix D

Key for Theme-Based Assertions

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