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Developmental Education: Resilience and Academic Success in Rural Appalachian Students

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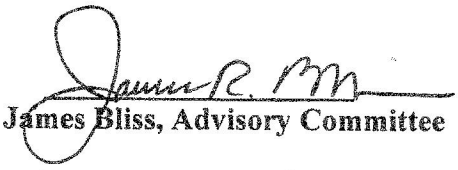

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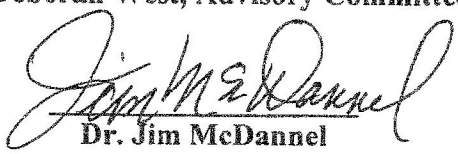

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DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION:
RESILIENCE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN RURAL APPALACHIAN STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of those Appalachians who have influenced me along the way, to those who come from the hills and hollows, to those mountain dwellers who are prisoners by choice to these hallowed hills, to those who are underserved and overlooked, to those who need their voices to be heard, and to the memory of my favorite Appalachian of all, my father, Gary D. Hunsucker.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank God for allowing me to be born in the mountains of Appalachia and for providing me with a life of opportunity, education, and service. The principles of servant leadership to which I ascribe come from my faith, the example set by Jesus Christ, and the example set by my parents.

My family has been instrumental in my personal and professional lives, always supporting me and encouraging me to pursue my academic aspirations. My parents, while not possessing college educations themselves, instilled in me the importance of education and self-sufficiency. Having servants' hearts themselves, they instilled in me a desire to help others. My father, Gary, was the quintessential Appalachian. His love of God and family was rivaled by none. His prayers for me enabled me to do anything I set my mind to attempting. My mother, Angela, returned to school in her 50s and earned an Associate degree and became lovingly known as the Campus Granny. She is truly an inspiration to me and everyone she encounters.

Without the support of my husband, Joe, I would have never been able to accomplish so much academically and professionally. When I thought I could not complete this program (or any other program I completed during our 20 years of marriage), he assured me that I could. When I felt guilty for dividing my time between work, school, and home, he picked up the slack so I did not feel so insufficient. My sons, Justin and Hunter, and grandson, Kadyn, were understanding as I attended school functions for them with a book in my hand or a laptop in tow. Everything I do in life is to make provisions for the individual and collective futures of my family.

Finally, I am grateful to the faculty of Eastern Kentucky University for their guidance during this program and for their assistance in creating this dissertation study. I offer thanks to my committee members: Dr. Charles Hausman, Chair; Dr. James Bliss; Dr. Deborah West; and especially Dr. James McDannel, my mentor and friend. Additionally, it is important to recognize past professors such as Dr. Roger Cleveland, Dr. Sherwood Thompson, and Dr. Tara Shepperson. Thank you for journeying with me.

ABSTRACT

The need for developmental education is ever present in higher education as more students annually enter college underprepared for entry level college coursework. Underpreparedness is a pervasive concern in higher education. Community colleges in particular are the primary means of shepherding developmental education. Academic underpreparedness is just one of the many obstacles students face, however, when endeavoring to obtain a college education. Students often have additional challenges such as those frequently accompanying first-generation college status, rural status, low socioeconomic levels, low levels of self-efficacy, and the lack of resilience which can pose threats to their academic success. Despite these adverse factors, some students still succeed academically. From such adversity, protective factors can emerge which enable students to develop the skills necessary to succeed academically and non-academically.

Resilient developmental students at a rural Appalachian community college are the focus of this qualitative study. In light of being rural, developmental, and possibly first-generation college students, some students find within themselves the ability to become resilient and obtain academic success. Resilient students possess protective factors which aid them in becoming successful and maneuvering the educational system from developmental course work to college level course work and even on to college graduation. This resiliency can be explained and shared with other students to serve as an impetus for the development of their own resilience despite being at-risk students. This qualitative dissertation study focuses on the lived experiences of ten community college students from rural Appalachia. This study tells their stories of success in their own voices.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This qualitative dissertation study is about the lived experiences of ten successful community college students from rural Appalachia, all of whom were developmental education students as well. This study focuses on their challenges with entering college underprepared and taking developmental coursework prior to enrolling in entry level college courses. The students were all similar in that they shared basic demographic categories, were from the same rural area in Appalachia, and were all required to take developmental coursework before moving on to entry level college courses. While similar in many ways, each student was unique in his or her own educational journey and the personal characteristics which they brought with them to the college classroom.

Background information pertaining to developmental education and the rural area in which the study takes place is provided as it relates to the students who participated in this study and the stories of success they shared. This background information provides a glimpse into the personal and academic lives of these students. Additionally, background information regarding resilience and other protective factors are discussed. Preparing students for entry level college courses is a challenging task for developmental education departments at colleges and universities across the country, specifically community colleges as the bulk of developmental education is provided within their auspices. In fact, remediation is found in nearly 100 percent of community colleges (Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999). Developmental education is often referred to as remedial education, so the terms are often used interchangeably, as they will be throughout this study.

Underprepared students lack the skills necessary for success in college level courses

therefore posing problems with academic performance, retention, and program completion and thus, have to be remediated (Boylan, 2009; Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Long, 2011). Basic educational skills are then taught via developmental courses.

While currently a highly debated topic in education, it is important to keep in mind that developmental education, or remediation, began nearly 400 years ago at Harvard and was designed to remediate adults in the area of reading (Wolfe, 2012). While the scope of developmental education has changed to now include English and mathematics as well as reading, its existence is now more important than ever. It has been speculated that without developmental education, nearly two million students would be negatively affected (Wolfe, 2012). Further, developmental education affords access to under-represented students and for that reason, is a much needed facet of higher education (Boylan, Bonham, & Tafari, 2005). The need for developmental education is ever present and signals for a response from community college educators and administrators in order to produce successfully remediated students who go on to be credential holding individuals.

Community colleges lead the way in responding to the need for developmental education, as their open admissions policies are commonplace and underprepared students find educational opportunities there that they would not be afforded at four-year colleges and/or universities. Considering that 57% of all community colleges serve rural populations and are classified as being rural, it is only logical that attention be given to the plight of the marginalized people from such rural areas (Cejda, 2010). Rural, Appalachian community colleges contend with their own challenges, similar to those of their student body, in regard to financial challenges and other issues related to place.

Rural Appalachian community colleges often operate with meager budgets, limited personnel, and are challenged by the challenging socioeconomic issues of the areas in which they serve.

Students partaking in developmental, or remedial, education are often referred to as developmental students, deficient students, or underprepared students as well. These developmental students are identified based on high school grade point averages and ACT or other computerized placement test scores, which are said to be worthy indicators of performance in college (Thompson, 1998). In response to the growing need for developmental education it is reported that "nearly all community colleges nationwide offer developmental education to under-prepared students as a prerequisite for college-level courses" (Kolajo, 2004, p. 365). The Department of Education persistently reports on the chronic and growing need for developmental education at the postsecondary level (Hollis, 2009). Each year, high school graduates are entering college without the necessary skills to succeed in courses requiring basic arithmetic skills, an adequate level of reading comprehension, and general writing skills to include grammar, usage and mechanics (Hollis, 2009; Crisp & Delgado, 2014). In the absence of developmental education, many students would be denied the opportunity to participate in, and succeed in, higher education (Russell, 2008). The increasing number of underprepared students lends itself to the growing need for improved developmental education. Further, these underprepared students need to know that despite their academic challenges, they can persevere and succeed in not only developmental coursework, but in college level courses as well. Developmental education exists to serve the purpose of skill attainment or skill enhancement.

However, academic unpreparedness is only one component related to the many challenges facing entering college students across the country. Developmental students experience difficulties outside of the classroom as well. Zimmerman (1998) reported that failure may come from other factors external to academic reasons such as lack of motivation, lack of support, or other factors lending themselves to decreased academic performance. Additional challenges such as first-generation college status, rural status, low socioeconomic levels, low levels of self-efficacy, and the lack of resilience pose pervasive threats to a developmental student's academic success. Despite these adverse factors, however, some students will find within themselves the ability to succeed academically. Identifying why some students succeed and others do not is paramount to understanding how to make developmental education more successful. Future research is needed regarding student resilience, particularly where rural, developmental students are concerned, as this marginalized group is largely overlooked and underserved.

Success in higher education is more viable when students are provided with both academic and social supports (Tinto, 2009). In light of the academic and nonacademic needs entering college students have, student success courses are often provided as part of developmental education. As a student success course instructor, I see firsthand the struggles students face, academic and personal, which make achieving success in college difficult. I witness some students succeed academically while others fail, though contending with the same circumstances and being offered the same supports, at least academically. As this is a required course for students with two or more developmental placements, I get to work with all developmental students entering college on my particular campus each semester. I witness examples of both extremes—academic

success and failure, retention and attrition. I also have personal experience with the supports developmental students receive. I agonize over the loss or failure of each student each semester. These experiences led me to this study in that I want to experience more success with my students and I want to share with them how to achieve that academic success. By teaching academic success courses to developmental students at a rural community college, I address both the academic and non-academic needs of students in hopes of fostering such success and keeping developmental students in school through graduation. As the tutorial coordinator for our campus, I strive to connect developmental students with peer tutors who can serve as role models and assist developmental students on their way to entry level college courses. Study skill attainment and establishing relationships with peers is crucial to positive academic assimilation.

Student success courses teach learning strategies that include note taking, time management skills and test preparation. For these reasons, such courses are commonplace in developmental education curricula. Further, life skills are addressed and include conflict resolution, stress management, and financial management. As academic needs are typically deemed as being more pressing than nonacademic needs, the academic skills are often taught at the beginning of student success courses while information addressing non-academic needs is often postponed. Such courses may require adjustments so that the students' academic and non-academic needs are met simultaneously for increased retention and course completion. Further, the concept of resilience is being incorporated in textbooks used for instruction in these student success courses and is becoming a topic of interest to developmental instructors. However, by the time the non-academic factors are addressed, many at-risk students have already left college before even completing

their first semester. In fact, some estimates have reported that less than half of all students in remedial courses finish the course sequence (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). The intertwining of academic and non-academic needs is gaining attention, as it should, in regard to seeing and serving the whole student.

Developmental students at a rural, Appalachian community college in southeastern Kentucky are provided with academic supports designed to move students toward entry level college work. Students are placed in various levels of developmental coursework based on ACT or COMPASS placement test scores (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). These courses are designed to remediate students in the areas of math, reading and English. Additionally, free tutoring is available to developmental students. Developmental students are also provided with intrusive advising in which an early alert system is utilized regarding academic difficulty. Furthermore, students with two or more developmental placements are required to take a three-credit hour student success course to assist them in gaining valuable study skills, as well as life skills.

Despite these types of supports, many students withdraw from, or fail, their developmental courses before persisting onward to college level coursework and/or ultimately to graduation. Future research is needed regarding student resilience, particularly where rural, developmental students are concerned given their unique situations (Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008). Understanding the construct of resilience in disadvantaged or at-risk students can possibly enhance the development of resilience in other students (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Information gleaned from such research can benefit developmental instructors and students alike. Successful rural Appalachian developmental students can serve as role models for other developmental

students from rural Appalachia and as an example that diligence despite dire circumstances can be rewarded.

Research Background

Students at a rural community college in an impoverished area of Appalachia are students at risk for academic failure due to their personal and regional circumstances. Nearly one-third of the area residents live in poverty; the national median income for a family of four in this region is approximately $25, 428, whereas the national average income is $50, 000 (United States Census Bureau, 2011). The students participating in this study are from counties that are classified as being distressed (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013). This region has historically faced economic obstacles that include geographic isolation, low educational attainment levels, college going rates far below the national average, and poor employment prospects from its single industry, coal. In fact, the Appalachian region is most widely known for its troubled conditions and gained national notoriety when President Lyndon B. Johnson declared his "War on Poverty" in the region in the 1960s (Harris, Bernard, Mullinax, Worthen, Finch, & Womack, 2012). With an economy low in diversification, rural Appalachian students are increasingly susceptible to poverty (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Given the dire conditions, students in this area are considered to be a vulnerable population (Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011). Generational poverty is also commonplace for this area (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). The economy of rural Appalachia continues to struggle decades after the War on Poverty, as many rural communities have lost the viability of their "resource-extraction economies" with the closing of several coal mines in the area (Schafft & Jackson, 2010, p. 38). The

economic landscape of the area is as difficult to contend with as the mountainous geography of the region itself.

Further, the educational gaps of those in Appalachia are staggering with ACT scores well below state and national levels (Kentucky Department of Education, 2011). Studies have shown that rural environments impact lives and the life outcomes of the rural dwellers (Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanli, & Worthman, 2009). Additionally, negative stereotypes depicting the people of the area abound impacting how the people of Appalachia come to view themselves or internalize how others see them (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000;& Winter, 2013). The misconception that rural dwellers do not value education runs rampant in academia further adding to the bleak view of rural students (Howley, 2009; Wallace & Diekroger, 2010). This ideology must be challenged to change the way the outside world sees those from rural Appalachia. Further, this view is ironic considering that 57% of community colleges serve a rural population (Cejda, 2010). Examples of those rural Appalachians who triumph over the stereotypical view of rural dwellers often held by those outside the area can challenge such a minimizing external view.

These economically disadvantaged students have further academic risk factors which impede degree and credential completion that include financial challenges as well as academic challenges (Spalding, 2012; Russell, 2008). To exacerbate the problems students already have with finances and lower educational levels, developmental education lengthens a student's time in college and increases the costs of pursuing an education (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Economically disadvantaged youth are prone to limited life success and can often be overtaken by the adversity with which they contend

(Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). The challenges facing students in this area are numerous and pervasive. While such challenges can seem impossible to overcome, success in academia and life can be obtained.

Students requiring developmental education often require additional academic support. These include college success courses, tutoring or both. Additionally, such students often require supplementary nonacademic supports in order to be successful. Some developmental educators would argue that nonacademic factors such as finances, childcare and transportation have more to do with student success or failure than academic factors such as under-preparedness (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Spalding, 2012). Kuh, et al. (2006) reported that of the 45% of students who failed to complete degrees, less than 25% left school due to performance--rather, students failed to complete their coursework due to more personal issues. Spalding (2012) reported that only 55% of community college students in Kentucky persist to the second year of study. Cain (2015) reported that less than 10% of the students placed in developmental courses earn a two-year credential within a three year time span. Non-completion of credentials is a pervasive problem for developmental students. To put this into a greater perspective, Fike and Fike (2008) stated that educators need to be concerned about students who do not complete their college education because for every student we lose from the college classroom in our country we also lose an educational dream and potential income for a United States household. Increasing student success rates is at the heart of developmental education and education in general.

Assisting students as they work through academic and nonacademic issues is instrumental in the successful navigation of developmental coursework enabling students

to transition from remediation to graduation. Without resilience, students often falter at the first sign of trouble because they do not have the skill set necessary to overcome adversity and persevere through such challenges. Developmental educators can learn how addressing both the academic and nonacademic needs of developmental students may promote student resilience and persistence in higher education.

Protective Factors

From adversity, protective factors often arise which enable students to succeed academically and non-academically. Protective factors are defined as those characteristics or beliefs students have about their own levels of resilience and/or self-efficacy which lend themselves to success despite adversity (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Newman, 2005; Werner, 2007). Further, protective factors moderate risk exposure and response to risk (Zimmer & Arunkumar, 1994). Resilience can exist in both individuals, such as students, and systems, such as colleges and communities (Zolli & Healy, 2012; Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). Students are able to overcome the obstacles of poverty, first-generation college status and the like to succeed in their college coursework. Academic and non-academic factors can be examined through the lens of self-efficacy and resilience in that developing a strong sense of both can enable students to persist to graduation despite their challenges. Creating conditions conducive to academic success is of extreme importance (Kuh, et al., 2006). While being a rural, developmental and possibly first-generation college student might pose a threat to some students, others might find within themselves the ability to cultivate characteristics and coping abilities that empower them to prosper (McMillan &

Reed, 1994; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Further, resilient students, at-risk or otherwise, have characteristics and beliefs which lend themselves to academic success (McMillan & Reed, 1994). Werner (2007) also reported that protective factors often outweigh stressful or adverse factors in a student's life creating resilience. These characteristics and beliefs can be explained and shared with other students and function as an impetus for the development of their own resilience and self-efficacy.

Bandura (1993) found that students with low levels of self-efficacy avoid difficult tasks, whereas students with higher levels of self-efficacy are challenged by the task and use that task for growth, not avoidance. Encouraging developmental students to see challenges rather than threats is an essential task of developmental educators. Furthermore, teaching life skills and encouraging self-motivation and perseverance can aid in creating resilient students (Henderson, 2013). To effectively do so, developmental educators must fully understand resiliency and self-efficacy and how such factors play out in the lives of students. Then they must apply this understanding to the classroom to bring out the best in their students, both academically and non-academically.

Additionally, students can learn self-regulation in an effort to succeed academically. Zimmerman (1998) stated that successful students are very cognizant of their academic skills. Furthermore, according to Bandura (1997), students who are high in academic self-efficacy often exhibit self-regulation as a means of monitoring their academic success and incorporate persistence in their efforts. Students can learn to regulate their performance and their avoidance in regard to academic tasks. Self-regulatory functions enable students to equip themselves with the educational tools needed throughout their lifetimes (Bandura, 1993). Self-regulation is an asset for students

to possess, or gain, in order to become successful. Additionally, self-regulation places a sense of responsibility on the student and enables them to exhibit control over their academic endeavors.

According to Werner and Smith (1992), the stories of resilient students can teach us that "competence, confidence and caring can flourish even under adverse circumstances" (p. 209). Fostering this competence despite adverse conditions is a must of developmental educators as it impacts students and schools. Understanding how some students effectively manage the transition from being threatened by the educational tasks at hand to being challenged and motivated by their academic responsibilities is paramount to successful developmental education. Examining the experiences of resilient developmental students from rural Appalachia can enhance the experiences of current and future developmental students in that such experiences can possibly provide a roadmap for others to follow. Therefore, the factors influencing student resilience must be identified and researched so that models of student success can be shared, understood, and replicated for future rural, Appalachian students—developmental or non-developmental.

Statement of the Problem

The number of students requiring some form of developmental education at all types of postsecondary institutions from community colleges to universities is staggering. Developmental education has been cited as one of the most pressing issues for community colleges to date (Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Spalding, 2012). Nationally, approximately 60 percent of students enrolled in community colleges require at least one

developmental education course (Bailey, 2009; Bailey & Cho, 2010; Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2011). Approximately 38-45% of all entering freshmen at Kentucky colleges and universities required one or more developmental course during 2002-2008 (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2010). Students often require remediation in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. To add to the problem of remediation, developmental courses do not count toward degree or certificate requirements thus prolonging a student's academic career (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). Students entering postsecondary education who are underprepared are at an extreme academic disadvantage from those who are college ready.

Students also face a multitude of challenges when transitioning to college life. For those who are academically underprepared, the challenges are even more daunting. These challenges further exacerbate the dilemmas developmental students face in the classroom as they attempt to transition from remediation to entry level college work and then on to graduation. Further, nonacademic concerns such as finances and family dynamics create additional obstacles to student success and course completion (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Spalding, 2012). Such concerns lend themselves to explain why some students succeed and other students do not in regard to developmental education.

As a student success course instructor, I see the struggles students face, both academic and personal, which make achieving success in college difficult. I witness some students succeed while others fail. Working in the developmental education department, I am also aware of the effort put forth by instructors, advisors and tutors to retain developmental students. Some students, however, do not take advantage of the supports in place for them. Others, however, persist not only through completion of their required

developmental coursework, but on to college level courses, selective admissions programs, graduation and/or transfer to four-year institutions. The presence of resilience in developmental students is often the distinguishing factor. The scarce literature in existence regarding resilience in rural Appalachian community college students needs to be expanded upon to convey the stories of success among this demographic. Sharing stories of success can help inspire future academic victories when rural, Appalachian community college students see success from among their own socioeconomic and geographic demographic.

Rationale for Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to examine the presence of student resilience in persisting through completion of developmental coursework despite what seems to be insurmountable odds such as at-risk status or other influential factors and further persisting to obtain a college credential. Identifying resilient students and thoroughly studying their experiences as developmental college students, particularly in rural Appalachia, is essential in understanding the plight of at-risk, developmental students from the region. Much is written about Appalachia from an outside perspective. Little is written from the perspective of Appalachian students. Sharing the essence of their experiences is paramount to this study, as it can help future generations of rural, Appalachian students contending with developmental education. Further, developmental educators can learn how addressing students' academic and non-academic needs can promote such resilience.

This study was achieved by identifying and interviewing various students from a rural, Appalachia community college about their experiences as developmental students. Students who have successfully maneuvered through the developmental process were identified and interviewed. Those students discussed in detail why they were resilient in completing their coursework and explained how they navigated the educational system through completion toward a credential. Results from this study will illustrate ways in which students developed and utilized resilience, self-efficacy, and other protective factors as they moved from developmental coursework to entry level college work and ultimately on to degree completion and/or transfer to a four year college or university.

Student success course instructors like me witness the various struggles that students face while seeking a college degree, both academic and personal, which make achieving success in college difficult and in some cases, impossible. Some students succeed while others fail while contending with similar life circumstances, challenges, responsibilities and the like. The hope of this research was to identify how rural, Appalachian, developmental students succeed despite academic and non-academic obstacles. The understanding obtained from this research can serve as a springboard for other students facing similar impediments to educational attainment and provide for them the inspirational stories of students who share their academic and demographic likeness.

Fike and Fike (2008) stressed the importance of understanding why students choose to either leave higher education or persist to completion of a program of study and how this understanding is crucial to making a difference in the lives of students. Information obtained from research and personal interviews will be used to provide an assessment of the current situations facing developmental students enrolled at this rural,

Appalachian community college. The challenges that exist for rural developmental students are emphasized as they relate to the concept of resilience.

Research Questions

1. What personal characteristics enable student success in developmental education?
2. What barriers impede student success in developmental coursework?
3. How can developmental educators address both the academic and non-academic needs of developmental students?
4. How do rural Appalachian students develop and exhibit resilience in regard to academic success?

Delimitations

This study is limited to students at a particular rural, Appalachian community college who volunteered to participate in this research study. Additionally, the participating students were purposively selected from a convenience sample identified by the developmental advisors at this particular community college. This research study is further limited to students who had two or more developmental placements thus requiring the completion of a student success course. This research study focuses only on students who successfully completed all of their required developmental courses and the mandatory three credit hour student success course. Additionally, the results of this study are limited to students with similar experiences at one institution. The small sample size

of only ten participants further limits the study. The fact that the sample was quite homogenous also limits the study.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study. A working definition of each is provided to enhance the understanding of the terms and their importance to the overall concept of the study and its participants.

Appalachian is defined as following the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi and includes "all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia" (ARC, 2014). Further, Appalachian is a wide ranging term despite its use being often used to describe a "homogenous" population (O'Quinn, 1999). Appalachians are anything, but homogenous.

At-risk Students are defined as being at a potential risk in regard to "academic persistence and retention" (Hand & Payne, 2008). These students are deemed at risk for non-completion of courses and/or programs because of various personal and social factors they bring with them to the college experience. They often have extenuating circumstances that hinder their academic performance such as rural status, first-generation college status, developmental status, and/or low socioeconomic status. Additionally, these students might be identified as having low levels of resilience.

Compass is a placement test used to place students in the appropriate levels of reading, writing and/or mathematics. It is a computer adaptive college placement

instrument (ACT, 2014). Students at this particular community college are required to take the Compass if they have not had an ACT or if their ACT scores were below the required benchmarks for entry level college coursework.

Developmental Education refers to courses designed to prepare students for entry-level college work. Students often require a year of developmental education before they are prepared to move on to college level courses (Boylan, 2009). Further, developmental education is typically defined as applying to those students with placement scores below the required benchmarks in reading, English, and math (Deil-Amen, 2011). Developmental education typically covers those three subject areas and a study skills course designed to assist developmental students as they maneuver entry into college. Developmental education is often referred to as remedial or preparatory education as well (Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006).

First-generation College Status has historically meant that neither parent (nor legal guardian) has earned a college degree; however, Hand and Payne (2008) provided an alternative definition as neither parent (nor guardian) has ever even enrolled in college. This alternative definition further emphasizes the difference between FGC students and other students in that FGC students' families are less familiar with the process of college enrollment and attendance.

Marginalized refers to those on the outskirts of mainstream society. Marginalization implies being disadvantaged in terms of education and economics. For the purpose of this study, this marginalized status is due to the rural identity of the population being studied (Schafft & Jackson, 2010).

Protective Factors refer to characteristics or beliefs students have about their own levels of resilience and/or self-efficacy which lend themselves to academic success despite adversity (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Werner, 2007). Such factors tend to allow for, or facilitate, success in academia despite conditions that would imply otherwise (for example, the various at-risk factors previously mentioned).

Resilience refers to "fending off maladaptive responses to risk and their potential negative consequences" or "overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure" (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Newman, 2005; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). For students, this would refer to threats or challenges to academic performance. For the purpose of this study, resilience would be defined in regard to success in educational achievement (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004).

Rural as defined by the United States Census Bureau (2014) refers to all territory, population, and housing units located outside of urban areas and urban centers. The lack of definition, or the ambiguous definition as it exists in relation to the term urban, exemplifies the plight of rural dwellers in that a single, uniform definition of what it means to be rural clearly does not exist. In contrasting rural and urban, with the more clearly defined definition of urban one could speculate that rural means less "densely developed" containing less inhabitants (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Being rural involves being much more and experiencing much more than that limited definition.

Self-efficacy is one's judgment about his or her abilities to perform a given action (Schunk, 1991). How a student feels about his or her abilities to succeed in college is linked to the notion of self-efficacy. Steeped in psychological theory, the concept of self-

efficacy has been widely addressed by seminal researchers and theorists such as Bandura and Zimmerman.

Self-regulation refers to one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors as they relate to one's academic goals (Zimmerman, 1998). Self-regulation is closely related to personal initiative and responsibility and requires mental effort (Schunk, 1991).

Underprepared refers to students graduating high school or returning to college who are not ready for entry-level college work and who have a deficit in one or more academic areas thus requiring remediation (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). The terms underprepared and unprepared are often used interchangeably in describing developmental students. However, in the results section of this study, underprepared will refer to students who had basic skills, but had forgotten those while unprepared will refer to students lacking the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Conclusion

Increasing student success rates in developmental education courses is at the very heart of developmental study at community colleges across the country, especially in rural Appalachia. Given the dire economic conditions of most rural counties in Kentucky, young adults need a college education to diversify their skills and further, to succeed in life. However, to succeed in college, students must remain in college. Academic and nonacademic obstacles prevent developmental students from successful completion of their college coursework and degree programs. Nevertheless, some rural Appalachian students with developmental placements succeed in developmental coursework and beyond. Identifying what makes some students resilient while others fail will enable

developmental educators to better understand the needs of developmental students. Additionally, developmental educators can find better ways of meeting students' needs and fostering student resilience. Exposing rural Appalachian students to examples of academic success can provide such students with the notion that they can be successful as well despite the various risk factors with which they are contending.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review of the literature seeks to provide insight into the history and purpose of developmental education in the United States, as well as the challenges developmental education students face. Additionally, literature pertaining to the rural experience of Appalachians as a marginalized group within American society is provided. More specifically, a review of the literature concerning the experiences of rural Appalachian students is discussed as well. The position of rural Appalachian students within the overall facet of developmental education is of key concern to this comprehensive literature review, as the students themselves are the focus of the study. Overall, this literature review provides a context for the study itself by focusing on issues relevant to the topic and the population being studied—developmental education and the rural, Appalachian community college student.

Developmental Education Background

Developmental education is a rapidly expanding, complex facet of higher education, as more students are entering college underprepared for college level material each academic year. Nationally, approximately 60 percent of students enrolled in community colleges require at least one developmental education course (Bailey, 2009; Deil-Amen, 2011). A reported 54% of all entering freshmen in Kentucky required one or more developmental courses in 2004 (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2010). However, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS)

reported that 76% of entering students were underprepared in 2002 (as cited in Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2005). While this is a national dilemma, with estimates as high as 60% regarding the national level of remediation (Spalding, 2012), of particular importance to this study is the plight of rural students, such as those attending an Appalachian community college in rural southeastern Kentucky. Rural students are at a greater potential risk academically because of their marginalized status in society (Hand & Payne, 2008). Rural students are often more economically disadvantaged, creating additional obstacles to academic success (McMillan & Bishop, 1992). The conflicts rural students face in regard to higher education will be further examined as well as examples of resilience in such students as found in the literature.

A comprehensive review of the literature supports the idea that the need for developmental education is continuing to rise while the success rates of students moving from remediation to graduation is not improving; in fact, less than 25% of community college students enrolled in developmental education complete a credential within eight years of their initial enrollment (Bailey & Cho, 2010). Another study indicated that only 31% of students entering a community college leave with a credential within a six year time frame (Brock, Jenkins, Ellwein, Miller, Gooden, Martin, MacGregor, Pih, Miller & Geckler, 2007). Moreover, research shows that the non-academic needs of students are just as important as the academic needs of students in regard to persistence and resilience, for example, the challenges of those on the margins of society who must navigate remediation to arrive at graduation (Brock, 2010; Hand & Payne, 2008). There are many factors influencing the process and outcome of one's educational journey.

It is common knowledge that students come to college with varying skills and abilities, dissimilar internal motivations and diverse external demands (Brock, 2010). However, Tinto, as referenced in Brock (2010), stated that what takes place after a student enrolls in school is just as important as what happens before they make the decision to attend college. The review of the literature reveals that additional studies are needed to investigate the challenges, internal and external, of rural college students.

Marginalized Students

While considerable research abounds regarding developmental education, most of it is negative in nature. There is limited literature available about successful developmental students. Further, little attention has been given to rural Appalachian students facing remediation at the college level. While some studies have been conducted pertaining to marginalized students of Native American and African American descent, little attention had been given to rural, Appalachian students in community colleges. Additionally, even less attention has been provided to those rural Appalachian students who enter college underprepared for entry level college courses.

Appalachian students are identified as socially overlooked and marginalized, as challenges they face in their isolated regions impact their college going rates and college completion rates (Hand & Payne, 2008; Brown, et al., 2009). Further, rural locales are deemed powerless in political and economic terms (Howley, 2009; Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Rural communities have become disenfranchised as their economic bases have been taken away with the loss of extraction economies and the like. Low-income students lag behind their more affluent counterparts and are at risk for many negative outcomes,

including low academic achievement and limited resources (Kuh, et al., 2006); in fact, only 26% of low income students persist to a four-year degree compared to the 56% completion rate of higher income students (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). It has been reported that students with greater exposure to poverty have lower educational attainment levels (Brown, et al., 2009). In fact, socioeconomic status is one of the most common risk factors identified by researchers (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). The Appalachian region is reported to have the lowest college completion rate in the United States; further, the Appalachian counties in Kentucky have college completion rates at less than half the national average (Wright, 2012). Additionally, Schafft and Jackson (2010) identified rural youth as being marginalized because of their "rural identity" and the disadvantage they experience academically and economically (p. 137). Rural college students are more vulnerable to academic failure and attrition due to entering into college with fewer resources at their disposal, whether financial or otherwise.

Despite the pervasive adverse conditions with which rural dwellers often contend, a commitment to place exists which keeps people in the area despite the numerous problems associated with the given region; rural America is no different in that regard. Wright (2012) reported that this commitment to place impacts students' decisions regarding postsecondary education and career. As many students choose to go to college locally due to the affordable tuition and proximity to family, rural students are no different in that regard. Their lives as well as their support systems are able to stay intact. Remaining close to home enables students to remain the same in that the culture and place are static. Further, those students committed to the area see remaining as a way to

increase the educational advancement of the area (Wright, 2012). Appalachians have a history of self-sustainment and cooperation (Harris, et al, 2012). Further, the Appalachian culture is steeped in tradition based around loyalty to place and family; additionally, a high level of self-reliance is exhibited by rural dwellers in the Appalachian regions (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000). There is a strong desire to remain close to home and improve the conditions of home via improved educational attainment.

Many factors should be considered when discussing retention and completion of developmental students, especially in the rural setting. One factor of primary importance is possessing first-generation college status. Studies have shown that first-generation college students are more likely to enroll in developmental coursework (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). First-generation college students are identified as having lower retention rates—based on correlations between retention and completion rates and the educational attainment levels of developmental students' parents (Fike & Fike, 2008; Crisp & Delgado, 2014). While first-generation college students make up 24% of the undergraduate population, this group of students is reported to experience less success academically than their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation college students are also less likely to enter college with an understanding of higher education policies and procedures putting them at a further disadvantage (Boylan, Bonham, & Tafari, 2005). In turn, first-generation college students hail from families with limited knowledge of higher education practices (Schultz, 2004). This lack of knowledge puts first-generation college students at a greater disadvantage because they do not know the policies and procedures associated with higher education. Exposure to higher education is limited for this demographic group.

Additionally, first generation college students are less engaged than their non-first generation counterparts (Kuh, et al., 2006). This lack of engagement lends itself to lack of completion in regard to academic programs. Further, first-generation college students are reported to be less likely to transfer to a four-year institution than their non-first-generation college peers (Kuh, et al., 2006). Often this lack of completion has little to do with academic ability, but a great deal to do with personal obligations and attributes. Wright (2012) reported that a commitment to place influences rural students and their decisions concerning where to go to school and where to live. Many rural students choose to remain close to home rather than pursing higher education at a larger college or university.

Various transitional issues come into play for first generation college students such as social integration, interpersonal relationships, and self-efficacy (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Such transitional issues make a positive early college experience paramount to success. As rural dwellers are seen as overly concerned with connections to place, transitioning to college can be difficult for rural students (Howley, 2009). Parents' education levels have an impact on student completion rates (Fike & Fike, 2008; Kuh, et al., 2006; Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Likewise, one's level of education and income are often highly correlated (Brock, et al., 2007; Hawkins, 2011; Kuh, et al., 2006; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Brown, et al., 2009). Being labeled as at-risk can be an impediment to success in itself in that accepting the label creates a self-fulfilling prophecy for students (Bernard, 1993). Additionally, rural students have to overcome stereotypes of "poor, oppressed, hillbillies" and ridiculing from outsiders; in fact, it has been said that "bias against Appalachians is one of the few 'acceptable prejudices' to have escaped political

correctness in America" (Winter, 2013, p. 124 & 125). One study by Wallace and Diekroger (2000) found that rural students were exposed to negative messages regarding their pursuits of higher education. This bias follows rural, Appalachian students to the college campus and can negatively impact the academic performance of these students. Many of these negative messages are internalized. However, despite the many obstacles disadvantaged students have to contend with such as those described above, rural Appalachian students can be academically successful while vying to obtain a college credential.

While low socioeconomic status (SES) is often correlated with high school drop-out rates and low educational attainment levels, many at-risk students possess *protective factors* that serve as a *means for the individual to be resilient* (Hawkins, 2011; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Additionally, the literature indicates that despite hardships and risk factors, some students appear to develop coping skills which enable them to succeed academically (McMillan & Bishop, 1992). From the at-risk student's adversity come opportunities for survival skill development, both academic and non-academic. Such protective factors include, but are not limited to:

- Resiliency,
- Self-efficacy,
- Self-regulation,
- Internal locus of control, and
- Support Systems
    - Familial,
    - Non-familial,

- Institutional, and
- Community.

These will be further explored in this chapter as well.

Resiliency

Resilience is best defined as a process by which one overcomes adversity or recovers from some sort of misfortune or adverse circumstance to turn risk into success (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Newman, 2005; Zimmerman, 1998; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994; Truebridge, 2010; Benard, 1993). Others have defined resilience as the ability to bounce back or recover from stressful situations or as an ongoing process of positive adaptation to adverse circumstances (Bernard, 1991; Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011). Harvey and Delfabbro (2004) stated that resilient people successfully manipulate their environments to overcome or avoid adversity. Appalachians have historically been viewed as resilient because despite various socioeconomic and geographic challenges, the people of the Appalachian region have persevered. The same is true for rural Appalachian college students. While their academic and socioeconomic challenges are pervasive, educational success can be achieved. Therefore, the concept of resilience is specifically important to at-risk college students in that identifying resilient developmental students and understanding how they were academically successful is vital to efficacious developmental education.

However, scant research has been conducted regarding student resilience in developmental education when academic under-preparedness is not the only challenge developmental students are facing in rural Kentucky. The rural, Appalachian component

is added to this study, as it is much needed. Researchers state that resilient individuals emerge despite elements of their lives that predict their failure, such as being a first-generation college student, being underprepared for college, or having low levels of social capital (Fentress & Collopy, 2011). Risk factors which serve to threaten one's persistence toward graduation from college include the following: being academically underprepared, delaying enrollment in college, being a single-parent while attending school, working more than 30 hours per week while enrolled in college, and being a first-generation college student (Kuh, et al., 2006). Often, these non-academic factors impede student success in college. While over 75% of developmental students are reported to leave college before receiving a credential (Wolfe, 2012), persistence can be increased through social integration. This social integration can aid in developing resilience in these students.

Research has shown that first-generation college students are at an increased risk for dropping out of college, as often are developmental students and rural students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Fike & Fike, 2008; Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999). This risk can be minimized through a positive first year experience and through social and cultural integration into the college atmosphere (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Because many underprepared students leave school due to non-academic reasons, a comprehensive first-year program and comprehensive developmental program are essential and necessary (Escobedo, 2007). It has been estimated that 25% of a student's academic success is linked to non-academic factors and that students are even more at risk of dropping out of school if only the academic factors are addressed (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). The intersection of the student's personal life with his or her educational endeavors cannot be

overlooked, as the interweaving of personal and academic factors can create an atmosphere for developing resiliency for rural Appalachian students.

Special programs like first-year student success courses and federally funded programs such as Student Support Services offered in conjunction with TRIO programs can increase a student's chances of degree completion (Kuh, et al., 2006). The existence of these programs supports the notion that with proper provisions, at-risk students can succeed in college. Research has shown that students enrolled in these programs are more likely to earn college credit within the first year and more likely to persist on to the second year if they are part of such offerings (Cho & Karp, 2013). This success can be attributed to the comprehensive attention given to at-risk students in not only examining their academic deficiencies, but their life challenges as well. In the absence of such programs, the whole student can still be considered when creating and implementing programs of developmental study. This is why a comprehensive developmental education program is crucial to the success of developmental students.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs in his or her capabilities (Bandura, 1997, Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008; Schunk, 1991). The concept of self-efficacy is closely related to a student's beliefs regarding his or her success in academic endeavors to include their ability to self-regulate (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994; Bandura, 2000). Bandura (2000) stated, "Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act" (p. 75). The belief of success is

imperative to spur one to action. Zimmerman (1998) reported that self-efficacy has a major impact on academic performance; additionally, Schunk (1996) stated that self-efficacious students are more persistent and successful academically. Developmental students must gain higher levels of self-efficacy in order to find within themselves the means to succeed not only in developmental courses, but in college level courses as well.

As Schunk (1991) stated, self-efficacy lends itself to a variety of cognitive functions such as: goal setting, information processing, and motivation. Further, learning these intellectual functions enables one to transfer such abilities to other endeavors (Schunk, 1991). Again, developmental students can gain academic skills, as well as personal skills, and apply those to later learning situations. Confidence gained by succeeding in developmental courses can lead to the feeling that the student is capable of succeeding in subsequent courses. As Schafft and Jackson (2010) stated, "A small success can be a start—and each success breeds other successes" (p. 251). Possessing, or developing, a strong sense of self-efficacy is essential to academic success.

Consequently, Bandura (1993) asserted that being surpassed by others can be detrimental to self-efficacy. Such would be the case with developmental students who are not college ready and are not enrolled in entry level college courses during their first semester. This feeling of inadequacy, however, can be remedied with proper support in developmental education. In kind, Bandura (1993) further stated that a primary goal of education should be to prepare students to educate themselves via fostering positive self-beliefs, encouraging self-regulatory behaviors and exhibiting that academic challenges are to be overcome rather than avoided. Possessing, or developing, a strong sense of self-

efficacy can enable students to succeed academically, even in challenging situations. As previously stated, success in developmental courses can foster success in later courses.

Self-Regulation

As formerly indicated, Bandura (1993) asserted that formal education should provide students with lifelong tools to further educate themselves, including belief in one's self and self-regulatory capabilities. This academic self-regulation has been examined by many researchers in relation to learning and academic success. Learning, as well as self-regulation in learning requires mental effort (Schunk, 1991). Self-regulation, as defined by Zimmerman (1998), refers to "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions for attaining academic goals" and lends itself to the proactive properties of personal initiative, persistence and personal responsibility (p. 73). Such proactive properties can also be viewed as protective factors in regard to student self-efficacy.

Self-regulation allows a student to become aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses (Cukras, 2006; Zimmerman, 2002). Students not only focus on the outcomes of learning, but the *process* of learning, making them more successful (Cukras, 2006; Zimmerman, 1998). Further, applying metacognition to the learning process enables students to have control over the process itself and provides for students to become accountable, responsible partakers of education (Cukras, 2006; Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008). This sense of control can assist students in building a sense of self-efficacy that he or she can succeed and that success in academia is largely dependent upon them and not external forces.

Further, Woosley and Shepler (2011) cited that there are self-regulated learning variables which impact first-year student success; these variables include: expected success, a sense of self-efficacy, and well-developed study strategies. Having this knowledge lends itself to forethought and goal setting for students. Being able to see how current performance links to future performance provides students with the ability to envision academic success and completion. Additionally, realizing that certain academic areas might be problematic can cause a student to give that problem area more effort and attention. Knowledge of one's academic strengths and weaknesses enables a student to plan ahead for academic concerns or issues and make adjustments accordingly.

Internal Locus of Control

Another key protective factor related to resiliency is found in inner direction or possessing an internal locus of control. When students base their academic choices and behaviors on internal factors, they utilize internal protective factors to assist them in their academic endeavors and take responsibility for their academic success (Hand & Payne, 2008; Henderson, 2013). This internal locus of control is a source of individual resilience (Van Breda, 2001). Despite adverse circumstances and contending with academic and non-academic obstacles, students can recognize within themselves the means to achieve and succeed in higher education. Feeling as if one has personal control over his or her life lends itself to the development of resiliency (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Further, realizing that success factors are inherent to their own individual qualities gives students a sense of control, not only about their educational endeavors, but about their lives in general (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). Taking a proactive stance is essential to student

success, particularly when at-risk factors are involved. Rural Appalachian students with awareness of their trying circumstances can also be aware of the effort it takes to overcome such circumstances.

The notion of internal locus of control is well in line with the notion of self-efficacy or resilience in that self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs in his or her capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Those capabilities come from within, so the student is therefore responsible for his or her own academic performance. Additionally, resilient individuals emerge despite elements of their lives that predict their failure, such as being a first-generation college student or having low levels of social capital (Fentress & Collopy, 2011; Hand & Payne, 2008). Realizing one's challenges, while at the same time understanding one's personal role in overcoming such challenges, is crucial to academic success for at-risk, developmental students. Rural Appalachian students cannot accept the role of victim often prescribed to them if they choose to be successful academically or otherwise. As noted by Wallace and Diekroger (2000), despite discouraging messages about pursuing higher education, rural Appalachian students still lean toward possessing an internal locus of control and not letting their outside influences define them. Knowing one's strengths, weaknesses, possibilities, and limitations makes for a well-informed student who knows what they are up against, but who also knows how to contend with all of their life factors.

Familial Support

Social support can serve as a powerful protective factor for students. Social support is essential to one's positive psychological functioning (Fergus & Zimmerman,

2005; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008). This social support can stem from family, friends, the community and most importantly, the college community. Additionally, this support has an impact on pre-entry into college and while enrolled (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Family serves as a primary area of support in regard to protective factors that can enable students to succeed academically. Family is one of many ecological influences on educational goals and attainment; Appalachian families have been found to be primary providers of support for rural students (Brown, et al., 2009). Family support has a protective function as it serves to reduce stress in college students, affects psychological well-being and can serve as a resilient system as well (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Further, familial support can provide a sense of encouragement for students to continue on in regard to their academic endeavors, even when it seems too difficult of a task to shoulder.

As a protective factor, family support can reduce the risks of negative outcomes in a person's life; for example, despite living in poverty, many students can excel academically if given proper familial support (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Further, having family support can provide students with an avenue for dialogue regarding their educational experiences. Being able to talk with someone about their educational concerns can go a long way toward alleviating sources of academic stress for students. Family support can also come in the form of assistance in childcare, transportation, finances, and encouragement. Family support does not have to come in the form of financial support.

Parents play a key role in student success in that they can serve as their students' biggest source of support, even for adult students. The family environment, as well as family dynamics, can impact a student positively and negatively in that the more structured and supportive the family, the more resilient a student can be despite other factors such as income and other socioeconomic factors; likewise, families that are not securely attached and have volatile relationships can decrease a student's ability to thrive in an educational setting (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Ryan, et al., (2009) reported that in Appalachia the family is the primary support provider for students. Even when parents do not have the same educational experiences as their children, they can provide insight and encouragement, as most parents want better for their children than what they have for themselves. This is especially true of parents of first-generation college students.

Non-Familial Support

Nonfamily supportive mentors can serve as protective factors for marginalized students as well. Friends and non-parental understanding adults can serve as a means of social support for students, especially when they are facing similar challenges (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). Peer mentors can provide positive interactions for at-risk students and enable such students to form bonds with other students at their institutions of choice (Schultz, 2004). The social aspect of resiliency cannot be overlooked, as often resiliency can be learned and applied throughout the lifetime (Newman, 2005). Further, the concept of collective efficacy lends itself to this process as well. Collective efficacy refers to a groups' motivational commitment to the task at hand (Bandura, 2000). For this reason, intrusive advising, peer tutoring and exclusive developmental advising are paramount to

student success in developmental education. Community college faculty, staff, and students alike can possess this group efficacy and in turn, influence personal efficacy.

Connecting with peers early on can improve one's college experience (Kuh, et al., 2006). Social networks in the academic arena can provide psychological safety nets for at risk students (Kuh, et al., 2006). Peers have an overwhelming influence on each other. Peers have an influence over nearly every facet of each other's lives to include academic, psychological, and behavioral ones (Kuh, et al., 2006). The nature of such peer influence depends on the student in question and his or her peer base. A sense of kinship can be found among developmental students enrolled in the same courses and contending with the same academic issues. This can create a support system for these students and further provide a sense of inclusion in the world of academia.

Having positive mentors or role models can set the course toward resilience and success for disadvantaged students. Further, mentors or educators can provide non-familial support to at-risk students. The presence of an adult mentor can be a crucial protective factor, as positive relationships with others lend themselves to the development of positive self-concepts (Boylan, Bonham, & Tafari, 2005; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Henderson (2013) stated that one of the most crucial ways educators can build resilience in students is to identify and reinforce a student's strengths. According to Bandura (2000), people can exhibit collective efficacy by which they work with others to achieve what they might not be able to achieve alone. They do so by working together on a shared belief or goal. Such is the case for developmental educators and learning communities found in developmental education departments.

Community Support

Community resources can provide students with the means necessary to succeed. Community involvement in the lives of students, regardless of level of education, is crucial to success (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). At-risk students have unique challenges to contend with while attending college. Childcare, transportation, finances, and the like often serve as impediments to educational attainment. Community development, however, focuses on unity and intervention through the promotion of self-help (Buiska, et al, 2010). There is a relationship between the community and the individual, whether that is a college community or the community at large. Boylan, Bonham, and Tafari (2005) referenced research specific to this notion; responsibility is reciprocal between students and the communities from which they originate. Improving the lives of students by extension improves communities and vice versa.

Communities that are deemed as healthy or viable lend themselves to the development of resilience (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Communities can foster resilience through availability of social resources, opportunities for youth to participate in community life and the availability of community organizations that provide for growth and development (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). Additionally, communities must see the bigger picture and align themselves with schools and students for the good of the community at large (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Sadly, rural areas are limited in their community organizations as well as community resources due to their distressed economic and social situations. As stated by Howley (2009), rural places are devalued and lacking in political and economic influence. Consequently, rural areas are lacking in regard to resources and representation.

Institutional Support

Additionally, one study finds that a key factor in student retention is the relationships students have with members of the college community (Fike & Fike, 2008; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). The college community is of extreme importance in regard to creating an environment that fosters success and allows for student engagement (Kuh, et al., 2006). Rural educational facilities understand the rural family. The school or classroom climate has an impact on student engagement and academic success; schools are powerful environments for growth (Henderson, 2013; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). Educational institutions have the capacity to promote self-efficacy and related positive constructs by providing students with opportunities for growth (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). However, being apprehensive to engage in classroom activities can hinder student success (Wood, 2012; Kuh, et al., 2006). Faculty members can work to alleviate this apprehension. Proactive strategies can be taken such as initiating contact with students, encouraging students, and listening to student concerns (Wood, 2012; Henderson, 2013; Kuh, et al., 2006). Further, increased interaction with students by faculty lends itself to the retention of students (Escobedo, 2007). Faculty members must engage in various intervention strategies to insure students stay engaged and improve success in developmental students in the classroom.

Educational institutions can provide environments conducive to the promotion of resilience. Such conditions include: caring relationships, role models, mentoring, boundaries, structure, and possibilities (Henderson, 2013). Institutions that have programs for first year students, as well as programs for underprepared students, are more likely to have successful students (Escobedo, 2007; Kuh, et al, 2006; Tinto, 1989).

Connecting early on in one's academic career with students and professors is critical to engagement and success for students (Kuh, et al., 2006). This is one area over which the institution has direct control (Kuh, et al, 2006). Programming can be implemented to increase engagement and success. Schools, regardless of the level, have key conditions that promote resiliency in students to include encouraging relationships, role models and structure (Henderson, 2013; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Increased academic and social integration allows for greater commitment to one's academic goals. As reported by Tinto (2009), incidences of academic and social support increase the likelihood of student success especially when such support is aligned with classroom objectives and overall learning. Academic and social integration are key components to student success in that such integration allows for a sense of belonging in the world of higher education.

In light of various at-risk factors students face in regard to educational attainment, it is important to keep in mind that educators are teaching students as a whole; rather, students are not compartmentalized to the school environment, and their home environments and backgrounds will follow them into the classroom. That being said, developmental education must encompass the development of personal and academic skills, as passing early developmental courses coincides with higher GPAs and increased retention (Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999). This is especially true for rural students, as they often feel disconnected or disengaged from their educational surroundings (Hendrickson, 2012). Student engagement is a key factor in retaining at-risk students, whether they are developmental, first-generation college, or rural students. Institutional commitment to increasing that student engagement is imperative to successful developmental programming (Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006). Making developmental

students feel a part of the college environment is crucial to success of the students and developmental programming.

Sadly, the negative stereotypical view in which Appalachians are held follows rural students into academia and further separates students from the mainstream (Winter, 2013). Further, it has been documented that underrepresented students, such as Appalachians, struggle with integration into the academic setting (Kuh, et al., 2006). This must be combatted fiercely to integrate rural Appalachian students into the classroom, especially those students who choose to pursue higher education outside of Appalachia. The use of learning communities and collaborative learning opportunities seek to engage underprepared, at-risk students and thus, increase integration into the college community. Connecting with their fellow students enables developmental students to feel a sense of belonging and kinship with other students. Feeling part of the college culture is crucial to academic success and persistence.

Historically, developmental students have limited interaction with the larger college environment (Sherwin, 2011). This isolation, as often experienced by rural learners, must change if developmental students are going to move from remediation to graduation. College faculty members have a direct impact on student attitudes, retention and completion. A student cannot be expected to see the value in developmental education if those providing the educational experiences do not. Proactive administrators and highly informed instructors can improve both the quality of education and the delivery of that education in students' lives (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). This proactive stance can exist for all forms of education, not just developmental; additionally, this ideology can serve rural and urban areas alike. This notion is of particular importance to

rural education, however, as attitudes toward rural students are often tainted by preconceived notions about this particular demographic. Further, a college student cannot be expected to hold his or her Appalachian identity in high regard, if others do not, particularly if said student has an external locus of control; what those outside of rural Appalachia believe about a student's ability should not determine what the student believes about his or her abilities (Winter, 2013). However, what others believe does influence us, whether positively or negatively.

The smaller professor to student ratio at a community college provides an environment more conducive for such needed interaction. The affordability and "home town college" feel afforded by the local community college are factors which cannot be overlooked in regard to institutional fit (Wright, 2012). Additionally, the community college is designed to meet the needs of students who have responsibilities beyond the classroom and to serve the community at large. Ayers, as quoted in Wright (2012) stated, "…if you are doing the job right, you don't know where the college ends and the community begins…Community colleges…were founded…to be community centered institutions…helping communities to accentuate…the culture and place" (p. 9). If community colleges strive to attain those goals, then their commitment to the citizens of their surrounding communities will be strong and lend themselves to the facilitation of institutional support.

Conclusion

The debate over why some students succeed when other students fail is ongoing and will continue to plague the world of higher education for some time to come. While

many factors have been identified which lend themselves to student success, numerous others are offered as obstacles to student success. Some students will not succeed no matter what support is offered them (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Other students will find within themselves the means to achieve despite adverse circumstances such as socioeconomic status, minority status or developmental placement. Developmental education, however, can assist students in meeting their educational goals by providing intervening programming to bridge them from underpreparedness to thriving college students (Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006). Developmental education has an important function in the lives of students, specifically rural, community college students.

How to foster or cultivate resilience in students is a challenge for developmental educators and higher education professionals across the nation. One way to enhance student resilience is to study the phenomenon and learn more about what makes students resilient against what seems to be insurmountable obstacles. Developmental students in rural areas can succeed and have succeeded in the world of higher education. Highlighting academic success stories of rural, Appalachian developmental students will serve as an impetus for success of other rural, developmental students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology and research design are discussed in detail during this chapter. As previously stated, the lived experiences of these rural, Appalachian community college students are shared in an effort to identify and highlight stories of academic and personal resilience in the face of adversity. This resilience is exemplified by the completion of developmental coursework and/or a college credential while the adversity stemmed from the rural, Appalachian and developmental status of the participants. The ten students interviewed for this dissertation research were selected from among the student body at this one rural, Appalachian community college based on their ability to be classified as successfully remediated students. The specifics of the research design and the characteristics of the participants selected to participate will be further explored in this chapter.

Research Approach

This qualitative dissertation study employed a phenomenological approach in exploring the presence of resiliency in rural students in developmental education at a community college in Appalachia and in conveying the experiences of the study participants. This type of approach was selected because the study of the lived experiences of these students is of extreme importance in articulating that success can be achieved despite seemingly insurmountable odds (Lichtman, 2010). Further, because I was interested in real people in this particular environment and wanted to address their

thoughts and feelings about developmental education, a qualitative approach was the natural selection (Lichtman, 2010). A phenomenological approach enabled participants to have the opportunity to express their experiences as being rural and developmental students and how they persevered in completing their coursework despite their underprepared and/or disadvantaged status.

As this study was about the lived experiences of the participants, the focus was entirely on them and their stories as they wanted them presented. As Lichtman (2010) stated, "The purpose of phenomenology is to describe and understand the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon" (p. 75). All of the study participants experienced developmental placement, rural living, and academic success. Information gathered from the participants was reduced into themes to thus provide the essence of what it means to be a successfully remediated community college student in rural Appalachia; my role as the researcher was to "extract the essence" of their experiences (Lichtman, 2010, p. 79). Further, this phenomenological approach is especially suited for education and educational experiences (Lichtman, 2010). The educational paths of these students are the focal points of this study in that it is their stories of success which will be shared.

This study was conducted at a rural, Appalachian community college with an average enrollment of 5,123 students annually. Approximately 80% of first-time, incoming freshmen require one or more developmental courses in English, mathematics or reading. Students enrolled in two or more developmental courses also are required to also enroll in a credit-bearing student success course. This student success course teaches students about college policies and procedures as well as study skills. Study skills

covered include time management, note taking, test taking, reading comprehension, effective writing, and critical thinking. Given their underprepared and rural Appalachian status, some students face and overcome what appear to be insurmountable odds. For this study, examples of student resilience were identified and examined.

Research Questions

My research questions were created to address the key areas identified as sources of risk and sources of resilience in rural, Appalachian community college students. I designed the questions to advance the understanding of the rural Appalachian community college student's life against the backdrop of developmental education and the region in which the participants study.

My questions were as follows:

1. What personal characteristics enable student success in developmental education?
2. What barriers impede student success in developmental coursework?
3. How can developmental educators address both the academic and non-academic needs of developmental students?
4. How do rural Appalachian students develop and exhibit resilience in regard to academic success?

Additionally, students were asked the following demographic questions:

Demographics

1. What was your major?
2. How did you decide on your major?
3. Were you a first generation graduate?
4. Did you receive financial aid?

Follow-up questions provided participants with the opportunity to describe and expand upon their experiences as rural, Appalachian, developmental students. Participants were allowed to describe in detail, in their own words, their experiences.

Follow-up Questions

1. Tell me what was it like to be a student in your major in your community college?
2. Tell me about your goals.
3. What is most important to you when thinking about your work career?
4. What made it possible to be successful in your program?
5. What made it difficult or most challenging to be a successful student in your program?
6. What educational tasks did you see as challenges to overcome in order to achieve academic success?
7. Tell me how prepared you felt as an incoming college freshman.
8. What educational tasks did you find threatening to your academic success?

9. What were other challenges you saw among your colleagues who were also successful in staying with their program or graduating?
10. What would you like to tell others from your area about how to be a successful student?

Research Participants

The participants of this study were students who had successfully completed their required developmental coursework to include the student success course. Additionally, these students had either transitioned into entry level college courses or beyond to graduation. Participants were selected through working with the three developmental advisors employed by this particular rural community college after approval of the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Students were selected based on their number of developmental placements, their completion of a student success course, and their successful completion of all developmental course placements while enrolled at this institution. Convenience and purposive sampling were utilized to identify students for participation in this study.

Ten students were selected to be interviewed from the various campuses associated with this rural Appalachian community college across its three-county service area. The breakdown of the demographic and qualifying information as it pertains to the study participants was as follows:

- Six females, four males;
- Six non-traditional students, four traditional students;
- All ten students were Caucasian;

- Nine of the ten students were low-income and financial aid recipients;
- Nine of the ten students were first-generation college students (FGC); however an argument could be made that all were FGC originally, but one participant's mother completed a Bachelor's degree while she and the participant were both enrolled in school simultaneously;
- All were enrolled in two or more developmental courses; and
- All had taken a required study skills course.

The students were deemed successful in that all ten had completed their required developmental coursework, met the grade point average (GPA) requirements to either graduate or be admitted into a selective admissions program at the college, and/or had persisted to four year colleges and/or universities. Of the ten interviewed, six had persisted on to a four year program with two of those six enrolled in graduate level programs. Of the remaining four, three had earned a two-year credential, and one would complete a two year Associate of Applied Science degree within the next term. A breakdown of those characteristics as they pertain to the gender of the participants is exhibited below in Table 3.1, Participant Characteristics.

Table 3.1, Participant Characteristics*

Characteristics	Males	Females
Student Status		
Traditional (under 24)	1	3
Nontraditional	3	3
Marital Status		
Married	2	2
Single	1	2
Divorced	1	2
Children in Home		
Yes	3	3
No	1	3
Employment Status		
Full-Time	2	1
Part-Time	2	5
Unemployed	0	0
FGC Status	3	6
Financial Aid Eligible	4	5

***Based on 10 participants of which four were male and six were female.**

Data Collection

Once identified by the developmental advisors and screened to insure they met the study criteria, participants were then contacted via phone to discuss the nature and

purpose of the study. They were extended the invitation to participate in the study. Participants were provided with a letter of inquiry inviting them to participate in the study as well as with a confidentiality agreement. Upon agreeing to participate, students were provided with a date and time in which he or she would be interviewed that was convenient for the participant. The location of the interviews was determined by the participants, as I wanted the study to be as convenient for the participant as possible. Prior to the interview, the participants were contacted by phone and then by email and were subsequently provided with the documents related to the study.

Participants were interviewed using an interview protocol I created regarding their experiences as developmental students in this rural setting to address the following areas: major selection, educational goals, first-generation college status, experiences at their community college, success they experienced, challenges they had to overcome, and advice they have for future students like themselves. Additionally, students were interviewed concerning any challenges, academic or nonacademic, they faced in regard to developmental course completion. Study participants were asked demographic questions as well about age, gender, socioeconomic status, race and family status. These in-depth, recorded interviews typically took 45 minutes to one hour to complete. As interviewing is the "most common form of data collection in qualitative research," the interviews were very important and the questions were purposive in that they were designed to identify the participants' feelings and thoughts in detail (Lichtman, 2010, p. 139). Most interviews were conducted on the campus affiliated with the study participant. Study participants were also provided with the opportunity to ask questions and relay any pertinent

information they wished to share about their experiences which was not addressed in the interview questions.

In addition to the interviews conducted, student records were obtained to address course completion rates, GPA, and course withdrawal rates. Permission was obtained from all participants to record the interview session with the exception of one student who was interviewed electronically due to a scheduling issue on the participant's part. This electronic interview took place via email and was approved by the dissertation chair prior to taking place. The participants in this study, though assured they would be provided anonymity and pseudonyms would be used in referencing them, were not concerned with remaining anonymous. They were willing to share their stories of success and their personal and academic challenges to obtaining that success.

Data Analysis

This study used phenomenological methodology to analyze the collected data. Interview transcripts were manually reviewed, coded, and categorized based on reoccurring themes shared by the study participants. I critically and repeatedly analyzed the data obtained from the interviews and academic records to identify connections between student experiences with developmental education and student resilience. Using the data gleaned from the in-depth interviews, themes emerged defining how personal, academic, and socioeconomic factors lend themselves to successful developmental course navigation.

The data were carefully analyzed using the following steps:

1. Each recorded face-to-face interview was personally screened and transcribed verbatim.
2. Transcripts were then read thoroughly to highlight pertinent information related to the students' experiences in their own words.
3. Transcripts were then read a second time to make detailed notes and identify themes shared by the participants.
4. Transcripts were reviewed a third time to identify information provided by each student which was in line with the literature.
5. Transcripts were reviewed a final time to identify information provided by each participant that might contradict the literature or provide an alternate explanation for his/her performance in college.

Researcher Subjectivity

Acknowledging subjectivity in qualitative research is essential because self-disclosure provides authenticity and allows others to understand the researcher's perspective (Lichtman, 2010). As a rural resident and a long time professor at a rural community college, I understand rural students and developmental students alike and their many obstacles including: poverty levels, family status, academic issues such as under-preparedness and nonacademic factors. My subjectivity stems from years of experience with, and sensitivity toward, this demographic group. Acknowledging my own experiences and positionality as a rural student and a rural educator has shaped my views regarding my research topic. Additionally, being a first-generation college student

myself I possess sensitivity to this group of participants which must be acknowledged. However, I also possess integrity and wanted the study to be as authentic and trustworthy as possible. Working with the developmental advisors for each of the main three campuses of this rural community college in Appalachia provided a safety measure in that I did not hand pick the participants of the study; rather, I worked in unison with the developmental advisors to select participants based on their willingness to participate and their thorough alignment with the study criteria.

I am aware of the ways in which I could be influenced due to my own personal background and experiences with being rural and Appalachian and working with developmental students at a rural, Appalachian community college. However, until I designed this dissertation study with the guidance of my dissertation chair, I had been focused on the superfluous amount of negative literature abounding regarding developmental education. As an educator, I have been bombarded with statistics regarding the growing number of students needing remediation, the percentage of students failing or withdrawing from their coursework, and the number of students chronically finding themselves on the withdrawal or failure reports. I am well aware of the problems often associated with developmental education. For the purposes of this study, my focus was on the possibilities available to those partaking in developmental education at this rural, Appalachian institution.

Possessing a Bachelor's degree in psychology as well as Master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling and adult education, I am well-versed in counseling and educational theories as they relate to this specific population. My educational background in psychology and counseling has allowed me to develop keen listening skills, a genuine

sense of empathy, unconditional positive regard for others, and a strict code of ethics by which I operate professionally. Establishing rapport with the dissertation study participants was an easy task and attending to what they wished to share was on the forefront of my interviewing agenda. My background in education provides me with an insight into learning theories which might impact this particular group of students. Further, I am familiar with trends in education, current policies and procedures related to education and best practices in teaching and learning. With this background, I have a firm understanding of both the personal and academic issues students bring with them to the college campus.

Further, my work experiences have provided me with the opportunity to serve this demographic group in a variety of capacities. Early in my career, I served as a counselor for Upward Bound, a TRIO program sponsored by the federal government and Department of Education. This grant-funded program is designed to serve at-risk, first-generation college students while they are students at the high school level. Later, I served as an Academic Support Center Coordinator and had many duties to include serving as a tutor, professor and advisor. In working with developmental students for over a decade, I have taught academic success courses and wanted to discover what makes some students succeed despite their obstacles while others with the same, or at least similar, obstacles fail. The work community college educators perform to provide quality developmental programming for underprepared students is paramount to student success and well worth any research efforts. I acknowledge that I am biased toward rural education in the community college setting and more specifically developmental

education in general, as those aspects have always been a part of my professional career spanning over twenty-one years.

Personally, I am a rural Appalachian and a first-generation college student. I was a financial aid recipient as well. I was a single mother at the age of 17. I shared this information with the study participants because I wanted them to understand that this study represents *us*. I am part of this demographic and I understand this demographic from within. I feel my personal background enabled me to establish rapport with the study participants and promoted trust between us regarding the sharing of information. Further, a quote from the literature resonated within me and gave itself to the core of this study. As noted in Schafft and Jackson (2010), "To know where one is going is to know where one has been" (p. 183). Educational and personal success stories of rural Appalachians are as important to our collective history as are political and social factors that have historically shaped our region.

Trustworthiness

Each participant was provided the opportunity to correct any misconceptions that were inaccurately obtained from the interviews. Effective questioning and paraphrasing were used by me, as the interviewer, to ensure I was hearing in their own words what the participants wished to convey. Further, each participant was informed of the confidentiality measures taken to ensure their information was safe and secure. They were provided with an alphanumeric pseudonym which corresponds with their individual interview to further secure anonymity. They were provided with a finished copy of the dissertation study for their review.

Participants were encouraged to address all aspects of their educational experiences at this rural, Appalachian community college—the positive, the negative and the indifferent. Participants were assured that no judgment existed about their response and this study was about them and their experiences and not about the researcher or the institution at which they studied. When interviewing the students, any information I shared was a reflection of the literature which was in line with their descriptions of their experiences, and my personal opinions were not asserted. As a side note, however, my opinions regarding protective factors were also in line with the literature and the students' reports. My interest in this study was about honestly conveying the *lived experiences* of rural, Appalachian community college students who had been previously enrolled in developmental coursework.

Open-ended questioning allowed for the free flow of information from the participants and provided them with the opportunity to guide the dialogue. The exchange was relatively free from researcher influence. In summarizing the findings gleaned from the interviews, using quotes from the students interviewed allowed for the clear transmission of their thoughts and experiences. I wanted the voices of the ten students interviewed to be heard clearly and succinctly.

Benefits and Risks

The significance of this study is that presently there is a lack of research regarding resilience in rural, developmental students. This study will benefit developmental educators and students alike, especially those in rural settings. The inquiry examines

academic and nonacademic issues as they relate to student resilience in developmental education and offer recommendations for improvement in developmental education.

The community college and students remained anonymous and were not be identified by name or location. Security measures were taken to ensure that interview transcripts, student identifiers, and the like were secure and confidential. Several strategies were used to ensure the integrity of the data and its analysis. All interviews were recorded digitally to allow for ease of transfer for transcription, management and storage, except for one interview conducted electronically due to a student scheduling conflict. Interview notes were transcribed verbatim and scanned accurately. Any other documents obtained also were scanned and stored electronically. All items were password protected. Any hard copies of data have been stored in a locked file cabinet in my office, which also remained locked in my absence. Given these considerations provided, there were no more than minimal risks to the students involved in the dissertation study or to the institution from which the participants originate.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The overall objective of this study was to comprehend how some students, despite struggling with various risk factors, were academically successful against seemingly insurmountable odds such as being rural, having first-generation college status, being from low socioeconomic levels, and having developmental placements to complete before entering into basic college level courses. Further, the overarching goal was to identify protective factors each student possessed or encountered which made them resilient against such odds. These authentic, first-person stories of the participants were specific to the individual students being interviewed; his or her experiences—in and out of the classroom—exhibited strength and success in the face of multiple, pervasive risk factors. Many of the factors identified by the participants as being sources of resilience for them during their academic endeavors mirrored what was found in the literature, as well as many of the challenges. These overarching themes will be further discussed.

Throughout this study, I heard students convey the notion that one just has to have the mindset to succeed and that he or she can "do it" (obtain a college degree). This chapter will use their words and their voices to provide valuable insight into what it takes to be a successful developmental education student in rural Appalachia and how to develop that mindset of which they all so passionately spoke. The experiences of the students mirrored experiences of rural students found in the literature in many ways. Areas of similarity included: dire financial situations, family dynamics, multiple life responsibilities, and reasons for choosing to attend the local community college to pursue their higher education. Their views regarding developmental education were

overwhelmingly positive, which countered the majority of the literature found pertaining to developmental coursework. Rather than seeing developmental education as a punishment, the majority of the participants saw their developmental requirements in a positive light. These views will be further discussed as well.

As previously stated, there were ten students who participated in this qualitative study by sharing, in great detail, their lived experiences as rural, Appalachian community college students who had previously been partakers of developmental education. Additionally, these students had successfully completed their developmental requirements and were currently either enrolled in more advanced programs of studies, had graduated from a program at the community college in the study, or had transferred to four-year colleges or universities in the region. Those students who had transferred were attending schools in the rural areas of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. None of the participants chose to pursue educational opportunities outside of rural Appalachia. These ten students had many commonalities, such as those previously stated. However, their personal backgrounds were diverse in regard to gender, marital status, age, family dynamics and employment status.

As previously depicted in Table 3.1 found in Chapter 3, it was evident that community college students, particularly at this rural, Appalachian institution, contend with more challenges than simply those of the academic nature; these students are more than just students. These students are husbands, wives, parents, employees, and/or heads of households. Their responsibilities are numerous while their resources are often limited. This is exemplified by the fact that nine of the ten participants were financial aid recipients. Other responsibilities include being parents, often single parents, and being the

primary care providers for their children. Aside from the hours spent in the classroom and on academic endeavors, the majority of these students work outside the home. The detailed individual circumstances of each participant will be further discussed in relation to their experiences with various challenges and/or protective factors later in this chapter.

Additionally, certain academic information was obtained from the participants which included their college majors, their credentials presently earned, and/or information about their respective transfer institutions. Their GPAs in developmental coursework was identified as well as their overall GPAs as students at this rural, Appalachian community college. This information is depicted in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, Academic Characteristics of Male and Female Participants, respectively.

Table 4.1, Academic Characteristics of Male Participants

Participants	Major	GPA*	Credentials Earned	Credentials in Progress
Adam	**Transfer**	**3.803**	**AA/AS**	**BA, Business**
Blake	**Transfer**	**3.565**	**AA/AS**	**BA, Human Services & Counseling**
Charles	**Transfer**	**2.881**	**AA**	**BA, Psychology**
David	**Technical**	**3.779**	**AAS-Respiratory BA-Human Services & Counseling**	**MA, Education**

Table 4.2, Academic Characteristics of Female Participants

Participants	Major	GPA*	Credentials Earned	Credentials in Progress
Anna	Technical	3.742	AAS-Medical Assisting	N/A
Beth	Transfer	3.557	AS	AAS-Respiratory Care
Cait	Transfer	2.792	AS/Certificate	N/A
Denise	Transfer	3.959	AS	BS-Nursing
Ellie	Transfer	2.871	AA/AS BA-Human Services & Counseling MA-Human Services & Counseling	N/A
Farah	Technical	4.0	AAS-Pending 2016	N/A

***GPAs are from the rural, Appalachian community college only.**

Based solely on GPAs and credentials earned, it is easy to classify these rural, Appalachian students as academically successful. All students met the requirements for graduation and maintained the academic ranking necessary to earn a credential. Several of the participants were also members of an international honor society for community college students, whose eligibility requirements include a minimum 3.5 GPA. Membership into this honor society afforded some of the students transfer scholarships when they went on to pursue higher levels of education.

Challenges to Academic Success

Using student interview transcripts to review the conversations had with the participants, the most pervasive challenges students contended with while striving for academic success consisted of the following two overarching topics with their related subtopics:

- Academic issues impacting performance:
    - Being unprepared (not possessing the basic skills) for college level work;
    - Being underprepared (having previously had knowledge of the basic skills, but forgotten such skills prior to enrolling in college) for college level work.
- Non-academic issues impacting academic performance:
    - Childcare concerns;
    - Transportation limitations;
    - Financial obligations;
    - Workplace responsibilities; and
    - Time-management issues.

Academic Issues Impacting Academic Performance

While the literature uses the terms "unprepared" and "underprepared" interchangeably when addressing developmental education, a surprising outcome of the study was that the ten participants made a distinction between the two and identified them in their self-reports as separate experiences. As a result, the two academic issues identified impacting academic performance were unpreparedness by which students felt they had no preparation for college level work and underpreparedness by which they felt they received a foundation, but needed that educational foundation expounded upon and/or refreshed. The two areas will be further examined through the lens of each individual student's perspective.

Unpreparedness. For the purpose of the results section of this study, the term "unprepared" refers to not possessing the basic academic skills required to succeed in reading, writing and mathematics at the college level. This distinction was made based on conversations with the study participants and how they defined their academic performance levels. The participants were very cognizant of their academic deficiencies upon entering college. Some students reported not having the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, as they were not taught those skills properly in high school. This was a surprising facet of the information obtained from the interviews, as I suspected only underpreparedness would be identified. The distinction between the two terms, as explained by the participants themselves, will be further addressed.

One male, nontraditional student, David, stated, "I had no knowledge. My high school years should have prepared me for college." Another male student, Blake, reported that his teachers "propped their feet up on the desks unless someone from the school board came by." This student went on to say,

> When the 'important' people came by, we would be given definitions and book work to do. We would all wonder why until someone poked their head in the door and they were wearing suits and ties. We never got a grade or took a test on the definitions. We never heard about them again.

These first-person stories of academic frustration were echoed over and over with each interview.

Experiences from the study participants were similar to other rural students examined in the literature. As quoted in Schafft and Jackson (2010), a rural youth stated, "We don't have the best schools, we don't get the best teachers or the best education. We know that we're going to have to catch up when we go to college" (p. 17). This is not to

say rural education is not, or cannot, be as effective as education in other areas. This is just one person's opinion; however, with that in mind, this sentiment was reflected in the recollections of the study participants. One participant, Blake, said,

> Our teachers never made us do homework. That is kind of how things were…all four years of high school. That's how it has always been. We didn't do work. Then, we come to college, and we have to work.

A female, nontraditional student, Farah, stated, "I had to learn things most college students already know." Another student reported not having the background to succeed in college level reading, writing, and math despite having a high school diploma. Another nontraditional female student, Ellie, stated, "We were robbed of an education. Our teachers just propped their feet up on the desk and we did nothing." These recollections are painful for an educator to hear. They were painful for the participants to recount as well.

A female traditional student, Anna, discussed feeling intimidated because she was unprepared. She said, "It's scary. I was not prepared. My school stressed CATS testing, not college or career readiness." Likewise, another traditional female student, labeled Beth, stated, "I felt unprepared for college because throughout high school I was rarely introduced to and talked to about college." Another student, a male traditional student, Blake, said he had no knowledge of what it meant to be a college student. A female student, Anna, said, "I had to learn study habits once I got to college." These students did not feel college ready in the least. These feelings of inadequacy can impede academic performance and threaten self-efficacy. As stated by Bandura (1993), being surpassed by others can be detrimental to self-efficacy. Feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed were ever-present during these interviews.

Underpreparedness. As previously stated, some students felt entirely unprepared for entry level college work. Other participants, however, felt *underprepared*, in that they had a basis for college level work, but needed to be "refreshed" before moving into more advanced classes. An overarching sentiment shared by the majority of the study participants was that these students felt they had to relearn things they had forgotten. This was often attributed to being nontraditional students entering college five or more years after high school graduation or completion of a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). One female nontraditional student, Cait, shared that she had been out of high school for ten years when she decided to enter college. When she did, she realized she had forgotten a lot of academic skills she once had. She reported that once she took a couple of developmental courses she recovered that forgotten information. Another female student, Denise, postponed enrollment in college for two years after high school graduation, and as a result could still be considered a traditional student by definition. Denise also reported feeling prepared from high school for the most part, but had lost some academic skills in the two years she was not involved in academics.

A male nontraditional student, Charles, had a different perspective on being underprepared. He said that he would recommend developmental courses to any nontraditional student because things are taught differently now than they were a decade or so ago, especially mathematics. He went on to state, "You are not less of a person because you have to take developmental courses. They are here to help you achieve in your higher level college courses." Developmental courses can serve as a means to refresh skills one might have forgotten or lost in the same way they can serve to teach students skills they never had.

As stated earlier, developmental education affords access to under-represented students and is a much needed facet of higher education (Boylan, Bonham, & Tafari, 2005). It is evident from the self-reports of these students that developmental education prepared them for college level coursework and was an integral part of the success each participant experienced. Refreshing, or gaining academic skills, is at the heart of developmental education. Without developmental education, many students would be denied the opportunity to participate in, and succeed in, higher education (Russell, 2008). The information garnered from these interviews supports this notion. The majority of those interviewed reported that developmental courses allowed them to experience success, which made them confident about the next level or coursework.

Non-academic Factors Impacting Academic Performance

As previously noted, students often struggle in the classroom because of factors outside of the classroom environment. As noted in the literature, non-academic concerns such as finances and family dynamics generate added hindrances to student success and credential completion (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Spalding, 2012). The non-academic issues identified during these in-depth interviews included: childcare concerns, transportation limitations, financial obligations, workplace responsibilities, and time-management. These areas will be further discussed. Additionally, the ways in which the study participants exhibited or developed resilience to overcome their obstacles will be described in detail as well. All of the study participants dealt with these obstacles, and succeeded academically despite their challenges.

Childcare concerns. The majority of the study participants were parents (six of the ten). They all mentioned the difficulty they had balancing their parental duties with their academic duties. Issues of primary concern included finding childcare options during snow days, which are quite common in southeastern Kentucky during the winter months, and during summers when county schools are not in session. Study participants relied heavily on family members to provide free childcare, as paying for daycare was not feasible. Many of the nontraditional students waited to enroll in college after their children were old enough to care for themselves, as they either did not have daycare options or could not afford childcare. One female nontraditional student, Cait, said,

> I started college the summer before my son started kindergarten. I didn't want to put my son in daycare and miss all those 'firsts' in his life, so I took mostly online classes at first. The evenings were difficult because I had homework, housework, laundry, and that took hours for me to do. I averaged about four hours of sleep a night. My son went to school the next semester and that made it easier.

Another female nontraditional student, Farah, felt a bit of guilt in dividing her time between home and school. Because she became a mother later in life, her children were young despite her waiting 33 years to enroll in college. She tearfully said, "Being a mother of two young children, I am pulled in two directions—wanting to be home with them and wanting to learn and maintain my grades." Farrah went on to say that she felt like she was neglecting her children because some of her classes were in the evening when the children were home. She stated that she would not be able to attend classes and maintain her grades without the help of her husband in the evenings. Farrah said, "He supports me. He's proud of me."

A male nontraditional student, Adam, a married K-TAP (Kentucky-Transitional Assistance Program) recipient with three children, received free childcare as part of his work-study program, known as Ready to Work. He and his wife earned college degrees before their K-TAP benefits expired. Despite having these supports, Adam and his wife still had to balance their schedules with one another to accommodate their childcare needs in the evenings, as daycare closes at 5PM. As part of the Ready to Work program, Adam, worked the evening shift at this rural Appalachian community college. As a result, his wife had to be finished with her classes and part-time job before 5PM, so he could work to help support them. Adam also reported having support from his aunt and uncle if his schedule and his wife's schedule created childcare dilemmas.

Another male nontraditional student, David, discussed his childcare concerns as the parent of an autistic child. Given his child's special needs, he did not want to place him in the care of a non-family member. Not having a good relationship with his own parents, David did not have anyone other than his wife to care for the children. She put her educational goals on hold so that he could pursue his degree first. David credits her support and selflessness for his academic success. As David is currently working on a Master's degree and is the primary source of income for the family, his wife has continued to postpone her educational plans to homeschool their two sons.

Transportation Limitations. While none of the students reported having transportation issues personally, when discussing reasons why they saw their peers leave college, they made mention of lack of reliable transportation as being a problem. Living in a rural area, there is limited or no public transportation. For the campuses where public

transportation did exist, the bus schedule was not in line with most students' schedules. Public transportation was not available during evening hours when night classes occurred. One study participant who now works for the Adult Basic Education program at this rural community college discussed the problems related to the bus schedule. She discussed how the bus schedule is limited in the number of trips made to and from campus, so students' schedules do not often coincide with the bus schedule. To get transportation to and from classes a student would either have to be there all day, whether they had classes for the duration of that time or not, or select course times based on the transportation schedule. Additionally, the public transportation was not solely for academic purposes, so the route might vary on a day to day basis. A student might not get to come straight to campus and/or directly back home creating issues with academic and personal scheduling. A male traditional student, Blake, who became a tutor after completing his developmental coursework, reported that he often had students discuss not having a ride to and from class and as a result fell behind and needed tutorial assistance.

Financial obligations. The study participants discussed their financial situations, which varied from person to person. Nine of the ten participants received financial aid and stated that without it, a college education would have been impossible. Qualifying for federal financial aid in the form of Pell grants, these students are considered low-income. All of the students referenced the dire economic climate in rural Appalachia. Many rural communities have lost the viability of their "resource-extraction economies" with the closing of several coal mines in the area (Schafft & Jackson, 2010, p. 38). The rural communities within the service area of this community college have experienced this loss

and the participants in this study had felt the impact of such economic loss. A male nontraditional student, Adam, reported that he used to own his own construction business and was doing well financially with only a high school education. However, with the decline in the coal industry came a waning of his work load and overall income. He said, "Miners could not afford to build homes. They were losing homes. I was not getting enough work to keep me in business." He went on to describe how stressful it was to provide for three children, ranging from two to eight years of age, while reduced to working part-time and pursuing his college education. This struggle was necessary, however, in light of the changing economy in rural Appalachia. He reported knowing that his career would have to change to keep in line with the changing economy.

A female traditional student, Beth, reported barely making minimum wage, which made pursuing her academic endeavors challenging financially. She maintained that she wanted a better life financially than what her parents had because they were currently struggling due to the decline of coal industry jobs. Another female traditional student, Denise, said she had to work two jobs to help with family related issues. The family home burned down while she was a student and she had to move in with her grandmother. She had to help with household bills, so she had to work while attending college. Another student, Charles, stated that he graduated high school and went straight to work because he could not afford to attend college. After realizing he could do more with his life, Charles said he enrolled in college and worked while going to school. Charles said, "Trying to hold down a job and pay bills is hard. Even with grant money, you need gas, food and electric." Monthly bills do not stop coming just because one decides to pursue an education. For this reason, many college students work while

attending classes, not as supplemental income, but as essential income to provide the basic necessities such as shelter and food for themselves and their families.

Workplace Responsibilities. In line with their financial situations, all of the students had part-time jobs, if not full-time jobs and/or worked full-time while enrolled in college. One traditional aged student reported postponing college enrollment for a year in order to save money for tuition. While a student, she worked two part-time jobs to pay bills and attend college. Despite having two part-time jobs, she still qualified for federal financial aid. Further, a female traditional student, Denise, said, "While juggling a job and being a full-time student, things got pretty hectic." However, Denise went on to say this allowed her to develop responsibility and self-control to meet her many obligations.

Four of the study participants were Kentucky-Transitional Assistance Program (K-TAP) recipients and as a result worked part-time at the community college in the Ready to Work program. This program requires students to work 23 hours per week to maintain program eligibility. These hours are in addition to the hours the students spend in the classroom. In addition, four of the study participants were tutors employed by the community college at which they studied. Serving as a tutor allowed them to work on campus and schedule their work hours around their classroom hours. An interesting piece of information regarding this form of employment is that these students all started out with developmental placements, yet went on to master those courses and subsequently master entry level college courses and beyond to qualify to become tutors. To be a tutor at this particular rural Appalachian community college one must have completed certain

general education courses (English 101, English 102, and College Algebra) and maintain a 3.0GPA. Tutors typically work 13 to 20 hours per week.

One non-traditional female student, Ellie, stated, "Working and going to school was tough. Juggling all of that (responsibilities) was hard." Another non-traditional student, Charles, reported,

> I had a job, working 40-60 hours per week, but I still qualified for a grant. I didn't make much even at a full-time job in this area. Some of the hardest things were juggling both work and school.

Overall, many students hold jobs that do not provide a living wage and consequently do not allow for "luxuries" such as a college education.

Time Management. An imperative skill to have as a college student is that of time management. The study participants discussed how that time management had been developed and mastered by them as they contended with their various responsibilities at college, work, and home. As previously stated, a female traditional student, Denise, reported that her many obligations forced her to develop responsibility, self-control and self-discipline. Another student, Blake, reported that time management made it easier for him to be successful. He said, "When an assignment is due, get it done. You are going to be busy, but it (course work) can be done." Charles said, "You can't put things off to the last minute." A female non-traditional student, Farrah, said that other students needed to get their priorities in order and not waste their time and money.

Comments the study participants made regarding time management included:

- You can't put things off to the last minute;
- Write down your due dates;
- Work ahead;

- Do not get behind;
- Get it (coursework) done when it is due; and
- Procrastination is the biggest challenge I see.

The study participants were well aware of the time and effort needed to be successful college students and had employed time management skills to contend with their busy lives, inside and out of the classroom.

Protective Factors

As previously described, these rural Appalachian community college students have many risk factors working against them as they pursue higher education. However, success in higher education was more feasible for these students when they were provided with academic and social supports (Tinto, 2009). Further, their academic success was obtainable as they developed various protective factors which provided for the creation of resilience. These protective factors moderated between risk exposure and response to risk (Zimmer & Arunkumar, 1994). The threat of academic failure was evident, but the possibility of academic success was present as well.

Such protective factors as identified by the study participants will be further addressed. In discussing how these students became successful despite these challenges, various themes related to their examples of resilience were identified from the interviews. These identified themes will be grouped into the following categories: internal locus of control, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and support system. Based on what the students preferred to discuss during the interviews, the characteristics they possessed which led them to experience academic success included:

- Internal locus of control:
    - Having a sense of personal responsibility;
    - Realizing nothing is impossible if you are determined;
- Self-efficacy:
    - Possessing a belief in one's self; and
    - Developing a "can do" attitude;
- Self-regulation:
    - Exhibiting self-discipline;
    - Putting forth effort to succeed;
    - Setting an example for others;
    - Setting goals; and
- Support system:
    - Having support from family;
    - Having support from college personnel; and
    - Having support from peers.

Despite the challenges these students faced, they either possessed or developed protective factors which aided in the development of resilience. According to Werner and Smith (1992), the stories of resilient students can teach us that "competence, confidence and caring can flourish even under adverse circumstances" (p. 209). The experiences of these students suggested just that—despite being first-generation, low-income students from rural Appalachia contending with developmental placements when they began their college careers, they emerged competent and confident students.

Internal Locus of Control

Having personal responsibility. Throughout the interviews, the students discussed the importance of taking responsibility for their educational experiences. "No one else can do it for you" was a sentiment reverberated throughout the ten interviews. One study participant, Farrah, who also served as a tutor said, "Students have to get their priorities in order. It has to be the student's responsibility. I can't do it (college coursework) for them." Farrah went on to say, "It was up to me to get the job done. If I didn't do my work, then I had no one to blame but me." A male traditional student, Blake, said, "This is what I should have done in high school. For my personal accomplishments, I had to put everything into it." This student also became a tutor after completing his developmental sequence and meeting the criteria necessary to serve as a tutor; he went on to state, "All my work is just refreshing. To see where I started is a confidence booster. *I did this*." The emphasis on personal responsibility as a student was shared by every study participant.

Realizing nothing is impossible if you are determined. All ten participants made the same statement regarding possession of a "nothing is impossible" mentality. Repeatedly I heard the phrase, "You can do anything you put your mind to if you want it badly enough." One nontraditional male student, Charles, reiterated the point several times during the course of the interview stating that he was *living proof*. Another traditional male student, Blake, referred to himself as *walking proof* that despite adverse situations, a college education can be obtained. He said, "Take the negative out. I am proof. I am the person that said, 'I can't.' However, I realized I can and I did, and I can

accomplish anything." The realization that he could in fact do anything academically that he set his mind to do was key in this student's overall academic success.

They all felt that earning a college credential was quite achievable despite their many obstacles, so long as they put their minds to the task and did not give up. Further, they all made mention of the fact that it (obtaining a college degree) was not easy. As stated by Engle and Tinto (2008), "the path to a bachelor's degree will be long, indirect, and uncertain" for low-income, first-generation college students (p. 2). One female traditional student, Beth, reported that she barely made minimum wage and obtaining her college degree had been "a long road financially." During her educational journey, Beth felt uncertain at many times, not because she was unable to succeed academically; rather, Beth stated, "It's a scary thought. You made it this far and what if you can't get the money to finish? What do you do then?" With the financial help of her parents, she was able to obtain her degree. Additionally, a non-traditional male student, Charles, shared how he turned his life around at this rural Appalachian community college. Something he once felt was unobtainable was within his grasp. He said, "I turned my life around. You never get too old to learn." He obtained his degree and is now working on a Bachelor's degree at a rural Appalachian university.

Self-Efficacy

Possessing a belief in one's self. The statement, "Always believe in yourself" was reiterated numerous times throughout the ten interviews as well. As previously noted, Bandura (2000) stated, "Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act" (p.

75). The students in this study had an incentive to act—to improve their lives and the lives of their loved ones. A female nontraditional student, Ellie, said, "You can do anything you put your mind to." A male nontraditional student, David, said, "Don't have that lack of confidence. You are going to be successful." All ten study participants believed in their ability to succeed.

Developing a "can do" attitude. In line with a belief in one's self, a positive attitude was identified as being critical to academic success. Students repeatedly reported that while obtaining a college credential was not easy, it can be obtained with the right attitude. Blake said, "Get it out of your head that you can't do it. Take the negatives out. It won't be easy, but you can do it (obtain a college education)." This student went on to say, "You are going to be busy, but it can be done." Blake reported that he was once the person who felt he could not obtain a college education. However, he did. Blake said, "I realized I could. I can accomplish anything. I know anything is possible."

Self-Regulation

Exhibiting self-discipline. According to Bandura (1997), students who are high in academic self-efficacy often exhibit self-regulation as a means of monitoring their academic success and incorporate persistence in their efforts. This was evident in the students interviewed for this study. One female nontraditional student, Farrah, made an excellent point in stating, "I expect more out of me than anyone else. I am the only one who can do this (earn a degree). No one can do it for me." One traditional female student, Beth, reported that any time she felt like slacking in regard to her academics, she thought

of how hard her parents worked to pay for her to attend college. When she thought of their sacrifices, she found within herself the means to finish what she started. She said, On days when it is sunny out and I think I would rather be out in the sun or running around instead of in a classroom, I think of my dad working in the mines sometimes seven days a week so I can go to college. She went on to say it was imperative to academic success to stay determined, focused, and dedicated.

Putting forth effort to succeed. The majority of the study participants referenced putting forth the effort required to succeed in college as a primary force behind their academic success. Repeatedly study participants said, "Get your priorities straight." A male traditional student, Blake, stated, "For my personal accomplishments, I put everything into it." Charles, a nontraditional student, said, "You have to have perseverance." David said, "You have to show up." This point was reiterated by Farrah, a female nontraditional student, when she said, "Show up and do the work." While this seems rudimentary, the students shared stories of their peers and their lack of commitment to their academic undertakings. One student, Ellie, said she knew many students who started college and did not finish. Another student, Farrah, said she saw people "waste time and money" by failing classes due to apathy and simply "not showing up to class." This student went on to discuss the misuse of financial aid funds among those students who simply stopped attending class. Farrah stated, "They throw this opportunity away. They don't want to do the work. They don't want to spend the extra time on it (coursework)."

Setting an example for others. It was very important to study participants that they make an impression on others or set an example for others to follow in regard to academic study. Participants frequently referenced their family members in saying that they wanted to show their kids they could do it or wanted to inspire their siblings to attend college. A nontraditional male student, Charles, stated, "One of my major goals is to show my daughter that you can do this, no matter how old you are or what you are up against. If you set your mind to it, you can do it." Another male nontraditional student, Adam, stated that he wanted better for his children than what he had and he wanted to show his three kids that a college education was obtainable for him and for them. A female nontraditional student, Cait, stated that she did not want to hear her son say to her, "You didn't go to college, so why should I?" She reported not wanting to answer that difficult question, so she enrolled in college. Another female nontraditional student, Farrah, said that she wanted to achieve highly academically and help others see their potential as well.

Setting goals. The students interviewed had distinct educational goals, which helped to spur them on in their educational journeys. The value each student placed on education helped them in visualizing and achieving their academic goals. One student, a male traditional student, Blake, said, "I know some people don't look at an Associate degree as a big thing, but it is a big thing for me. I worked for that." Obtaining that Associate degree was just one step on this young man's educational journey. Blake is now enrolled in a Bachelor's level program and reported feeling confident in his academic abilities as he moves forward in higher learning. Charles said,

> I want more knowledge. I am like a vacuum cleaner or a sponge. I can't stop midway now. I have some knowledge, but I can have some more. Give it to me!

The students not only had goals just for themselves, but also for their fellow students and their families. Charles, a nontraditional male, said, "One of my major goals is to show my daughter that you can do it (go to college)."

Support Systems

Support from Family. As repeatedly mentioned in the literature, family support has a protective function as it serves to reduce stress in college students and affects psychological well-being and can serve as a resilient system as well (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). The participants in this study all mentioned how they would have been unable to attend college without the support of their parents, spouses, and other family members. Family members provided key services such as childcare, transportation and financial support to study participants.

A female nontraditional student, Farrah, reported that her mother was a source of support for her and one of the main reasons why she stayed enrolled in college despite having financial and familial difficulties. She stated that she wanted her mother to be proud of her and see her obtain her degree. Another female nontraditional student, Ellie, stated that her mother provided her childcare and that she did not have to struggle with childcare concerns while going to college. Another female nontraditional student, Cait, said her husband never let her give up and would always reassure her that she could do it (earn a college degree). A nontraditional male student, Adam, shared that his parents were not very supportive in regard to him pursuing higher education, but he had an aunt

and uncle who always supported him. They encouraged him to go to college and even assisted with childcare from time to time so that he could attend classes.

Support from College Personnel. All ten participants referenced the helpful faculty and staff at this rural Appalachian community college. Participants described encouraging, caring professors who took the time to help them along the way. One traditional male participant, labeled Blake, recalled how the professors "would never leave students on their own" and how they took time to answer students' questions. A female traditional student, Denise, reported, "There was a lot of encouragement from my professors. Ask questions--that is what I always tell other students. The professors are here for you." A female non-traditional student, Farrah, expressed similar thoughts in stating,

> My professors are people I can look up to, people I can come to with my problems. My main support is here. They (the professors) are here to guide me. I feel very confident going on from here. I just pray I have more professors like what I have had here that care.

Likewise, a male non-traditional student, David, stated,

> I loved the effort the teachers gave. The teachers are going to get you through. It is almost like a coach. By the time they (the professors) are done with you, you are going to be successful. Overall, it was inspirational that there were people in this area trying so hard. No money. No fame. It was just about the students.

A male traditional student, Blake, said,

> All the teachers here would help. They would never leave me on my own. They actually cared and I appreciated that. They took the time with me. They answered all of my questions.

Support from Peers. The majority of the participants in this study reported seeking tutorial assistance from peer tutors for both their developmental and entry level courses. As found in the literature, friends and non-parental understanding adults can serve as a means of social support for students, especially when they are facing similar challenges (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). The study participants expressed this sentiment throughout the ten interviews. A female nontraditional student, Ellie, shared that she went to the Academic Support Center often for tutorial assistance. She also reported that she had a fellow student who was skilled in Algebra and that she sought her assistance quite often. A female traditional student, Denise, said when she first began her developmental English courses that she would frequent the Academic Support Center for assistance. After mastering those classes, she went on to master her entry level college courses and become an English tutor and helped others.

A female traditional student, Anna, reported that her program classmates, as well as her program coordinator, made it easy for her to be successful in that they supported one another. Farrah, a female nontraditional student, said that other students and tutors provided her with needed support on campus. Charles said, "There are tutors. I suggest everyone use them." Blake, a traditional male student, reported that he also went to tutoring before becoming a tutor himself. The peer tutors were an excellent source of support for the study participants.

Conclusion

According to students interviewed as part of this qualitative dissertation study, impediments to educational attainment can be overcome. Being rural, Appalachian, and

developmental does not mean one will be academically unsuccessful. While the journey to completing a credential had some additional steps along the way for these developmental students, it was not impossible. The study participants faced multiple obstacles and possessed various risk factors. They had many reasons to give up—they were low income; they were first-generation college students; they were rural Appalachians; and they had developmental placements to complete before their actual college courses even began. Further, they had children and jobs. They were not just students. As the literature reported, there are many at-risk students who possess protective factors that serve as a means for the individual to be resilient (Hawkins, 2011; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Such was the case with these ten students.
Their circumstances did not define them. As evidenced in this qualitative study, they defined themselves. They were resilient in the face of adversity. They succeeded academically.

They maneuvered their developmental courses well and transitioned successfully to entry level college courses. They succeeded in their entry level courses and ultimately, in their program courses. Academic and non-academic issues were examined through the reflexive lens of the study participants. Resilience in the face of adversity enabled these students to persist to graduation despite their academic and non-academic challenges.

While being a rural, developmental and first-generation college student might pose a threat to some students, others found within themselves the ability to be successful academically (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Information garnered from this research can benefit future rural Appalachian students with developmental placements. These successful rural Appalachian developmental students

can serve as role models for other developmental students from rural Appalachia and be examples that diligence despite dire circumstances can be rewarded.

The lived experiences of the participants were shared throughout the interviews to highlight their stories in their own words regarding their experiences as successfully remediated developmental students at a rural Appalachian community college and to clarify exactly what enabled their academic success. Their protective factors were discovered and described in relation to the cultivation of resilience. One way to enhance student resilience is to study the phenomenon to understand what makes students resilient against insurmountable obstacles. The understanding of the phenomenon of resilience in rural Appalachian developmental students was accomplished by this study in that the success stories of these ten rural, Appalachian developmental students were emphasized to serve as examples for other rural Appalachian developmental students. The voices of these successful students were heard.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The overall objective of this study was to highlight stories of resilience from at-risk students at a rural, Appalachian community college. In this chapter, I will provide a summary of the lived experiences of the participants and include additional comments and conclusions about how being rural, Appalachian and developmental shaped their experiences at a community college, but did not impede their success at said community college. I will also examine the results through the lens of the literature reviewed for this study to compare and contrast the real life experiences of this sample to that of the literature. Much of the information gathered from this study supported the literature found regarding developmental education and the social problems often associated with rural life. However, there were some discovered aspects which were not in line with the literature nor were these aspects congruent with the traditionally described Appalachian lifestyle. Additionally, unexpected outcomes of this qualitative study will be further discussed.

Study Findings

Data gathered for the study revealed that student success is possible despite various risk factors that place students at a disadvantage academically and personally. Possessing at-risk factors does not mean failure is imminent; rather, it means failure is a possibility. Success, however, is a possibility as well. The ten students interviewed in this study were successful academically, not only at this rural Appalachian community

college, but in their subsequent academic endeavors as well. This academic success, at the community college and the four-year level, can be credited to the resilience of these at-risk students, who when faced with innumerable challenges rose above their circumstances to persevere and obtain a college credential. These students shared stories of personal and academic struggles, but they also shared stories of how they overcame such struggles. The study provided support that at-risk students can persevere and develop the resilience required to succeed academically.

The study also allowed for the discovery of certain characteristics related to resilience in rural Appalachian students as well as highlighting conditions that impact this resilience. Additionally, ways in which resilience can be promoted in at-risk students were identified as well as part of the study findings. Areas for future research were identified as well as implications for future developmental education policy and practice.

Characteristics of Resilient Students in Rural Appalachia. There is no singular, clear cut description of what resilience looks like; however, several characteristics emerged which were shared among the ten study participants. These resilient characteristics included: possessing an internal locus of control, having a high level of self-efficacy, operating highly in self-regulatory behaviors, and having a strong support system. As previously referenced, the concept of self-efficacy is closely related to a student's beliefs about success in academic endeavors to include their ability to self-regulate (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994; Bandura, 2000). Bandura (2000) stated, "Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have

little incentive to act" (p. 75). The belief in success is imperative to spur one to action. The participants felt responsible for their educational endeavors and as a result persisted to graduation. Successful experiences they had as developmental students were transferred to their entry level college courses and beyond as they gained higher levels of self-efficacy and felt confident in their academic abilities.

Self-regulation, as defined by Zimmerman (1998), refers to "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions for attaining academic goals" and lends itself to the proactive properties of personal initiative, persistence and personal responsibility (p. 73). The study participants demonstrated such personal initiative as they took personal responsibility for their educational endeavors and outcomes. Developing self-regulation enables students to have control over the learning process itself and enables students to become accountable, responsible partakers of education (Cukras, 2006; Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008). As evidenced by the stories of the study participants, they had a sense of control and the realization that he or she can succeed and that success in academia is largely dependent upon them and not external forces.

Further, having realized that success factors are inherent to their individual qualities gave these students a sense of control over their educational endeavors and their lives in general (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). Additionally, Harvey and Delfabbro (2004) stated that resilient people successfully manipulate their environments to overcome or avoid adversity. The study participants are exemplary of this statement, as they took advantage of the educational opportunities available to them, both developmental courses and college level courses, and used them to their benefit to obtain various academic skills and achieve academic success. As participant Blake said, "For my personal

accomplishments, I had to put everything into it." He went on to state, "All my work is just refreshing. To see where I started is a confidence booster. *I did this*." Employing all the protective factors at one's disposal are paramount to becoming resilient.

Resilient students also have strong support systems; this support can come from family, peers, the institution, and/or the community at large. Family support has a protective function as it serves to reduce stress in college students, affects psychological well-being, and can serve as a resilient system as well (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). Several of the study participants referenced family members as sources of social support to include parents, spouses, and other relatives. This familiar support comes in the form of encouragement, monetary support, childcare services, the provision of transportation, and more as referenced by the study participants. Additionally, the study participants expressed having support from college personnel and peers at the community college.

Conditions Impacting Rural Appalachian Developmental Students. Risk factors which threaten one's persistence toward graduation from college include the following: being academically underprepared, delaying enrollment in college, being a single-parent while attending school, working more than 30 hours per week while enrolled in college, and being a first-generation college student (Kuh, et al., 2006). These conditions applied to the study participants in one way or another in that they were not just college students pursuing an education. They were parents, employees, caretakers,

and such. While these factors can have a catastrophic impact on some students, the study participants rose to the challenges they faced and persevered to program completion.

Additionally, the participants shared problems inherent to the region. Such issues included poverty, low educational attainment levels, pervasive economic issues, and geographic isolation. The students are from an impoverished area of Appalachia where one-third of the area residents live in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2011). The "War on Poverty" in the region rages on with an economy low in diversification making these participants increasingly susceptible to poverty (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). These economically disadvantaged students face many academic risk factors which impede degree completion (Spalding, 2012; Russell, 2008). To exacerbate the problems students already have with finances and lower educational levels, developmental education lengthens a student's time in college and increases the costs of pursuing an education (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Spalding (2012) reported that only 55% of community college students in Kentucky persist to the second year of study. Cain (2015) reported that less than 10% of the students placed in developmental courses earn a two-year credential within a three year time span. Despite these numerous and pervasive odds, the study participants found within themselves the resolve to remain, persist and succeed.

Conditions Allowing for Increased Student Resilience. The ability to exhibit resilience in the face of adversity is of the utmost importance to students' perseverance and credential completion. This research study found that a combination of internal and external protective factors produced successful rural Appalachian developmental education students. The study participants' demonstrated that they were cognizant that

their barriers were only temporary and not of the permanent nature. Their experiences as community college students in rural Appalachia were overwhelmingly positive. While they faced numerous challenges, they successfully overcame them through resilience within and support from the outside.

This study also raised important questions about how resilience is formed, cultivated and potentially increased, For example, did the participants increase in their respective levels of resilience or did they develop resilience as they pursued their college degrees? Additionally, what added to their personal levels of resilience? The internal conditions which allowed for the cultivation of resilience included: self- efficacy, self-regulation and an internal locus of control. As students progressed in their developmental studies and experienced academic success, they grew in both self-efficacy and self-regulation. Additionally, these students realized that they were responsible for their own respective educational successes (or failures) and as a result exhibited an internal locus of control. External conditions which assisted in the refinement of resilience included support from various areas to include the family unit, the college campus and peers.

Unexpected Outcomes

This study yielded several unexpected outcomes. The first was that students had an overwhelming positive response to their experiences as developmental students. Students often have concerns about developmental coursework not being credit bearing courses for the purpose of graduation and thus add to the expense and duration of one's college experience. The majority of the study participants did not see developmental coursework in that light. In fact, one student stated,

> It was difficult starting over again, but once I took those developmental courses; they got me where I needed to be. If I hadn't had those developmental classes, I would have never made it in my basics.

Another female traditional student, Denise, said, "I was grateful for those developmental courses. They helped me learn more than I ever expected."

The second surprising outcome was that students identified a differentiation between being underprepared and unprepared in regard to academics. This distinction came from their interviews and descriptions they shared regarding their academic statuses when entering college. As mentioned previously, the literature uses the terms interchangeably. The students, however, did not. The students who felt underprepared reported that they had a basis for college level work but needed to be "refreshed" before moving into entry level or more advanced college classes. The students who stated they were unprepared defined that as not possessing, or having been exposed to the basic academic skills needed for college level work. Those who identified as being underprepared explained that they previously had knowledge of the basic academic skills required for college level courses, but had forgotten such skills prior to enrolling in college. The literature does not necessarily make a distinction between the two types of students, but the study participants indicated that there was indeed a difference.

Another unexpected finding from the study was that three of the participants expressed a lack of parental support in regard to obtaining a college education. In fact, these participants were almost discouraged from seeking a college degree. To their benefit, they found support from other significant people in their lives such as aunts, uncles, spouses, fellow students, and college personnel. While this was surprising to me

as an Appalachian student, this finding was in line with the literature in that Wallace and Diekroger (2000) presented discoveries that Appalachian students often receive negative feedback regarding their higher education endeavors. Such studies found that non-supportive family friends often expressed that those pursuing higher education were either wasting their time or that they were "acting better" than their non-college going counterparts. This lack of familial support goes against the basic cultural context of the rural Appalachian family and was therefore an unexpected and disturbing finding. As Ryan, et al., (2009) reported, in Appalachia the family is the primary support provider for students. This was emphatically not the case for some of the study participants. One male nontraditional student, Adam, reported that his parents often asked why he was going to college and made statements that he felt he was better than them or stuck up since he enrolled in college. Another male nontraditional student, David, reported his mother's boyfriend deterring her from helping her son with college tuition because it would be "a waste of money because he is not going to do anything." The third participant, a nontraditional female student (Cait), stated,

> "I doubted myself because growing up I never really had anyone to push me, to make sure I was doing well in school. I knew that family members who did not associate with me were waiting for me to fail."

This type of discouragement could be why these three students postponed college enrollment in the first place. As college students, they found support from their spouses and other significant family members outside of their parents.

A final surprising outcome of the study was revealed in hindsight; after analyzing and codifying the data, it was discovered that students appeared to have experienced a

shift in regard to their individual loci of control. In reviewing the interviews, I noticed a pattern emerged. Those who felt unprepared for college level work seemed to place the responsibility for this unpreparedness on high school teachers and administrators. This is evidenced by statements such as: "My high school years should have prepared me for college" or "We were robbed of an education." Our teachers just propped their feet up on the desk and we did nothing" and "I was not prepared. My school stressed CATS testing, not college or career readiness." The focus of the responsibility for their education was on the school or the teacher versus themselves. This could be attributed to many factors such as age or life experience and warrants further study.

When questioned about their college experiences, the shift of responsibility was turned inward. As college students, the study participants appeared to shift responsibility for their educational achievements from the instructors and/or administrators to themselves and began to see themselves as the masters of their own academic destinies. To what this shift can be attributed would warrant future research, but plausible explanations include increased maturity levels of the study participants, increased institutional support found at the college level, and the exposure to developmental coursework. Other explanations could be that these participants viewed their barriers as being temporary and did not catastrophize their circumstances.

Existing Research

Existing research regarding rural, Appalachian community college students who have had developmental placements is scant to say the least, especially in regard to those who have been successfully remediated. In fact, there are limited studies about the

"qualitative differences in educational opportunity for rural students" and even fewer studies about the "role of higher education in addressing rural underrepresentation" (Schafft & Jackson, 2010, p. 193). While extensive research is available concerning the problems often associated with being rural, little has been written about the possibilities and potentials of rural Appalachians. In kind, much attention has been given to the realm of developmental education and its role in higher education in this country. Again, most of this literature has been negative in nature and examined developmental education in a negative light. Little attention has been given to the benefits of developmental education and the learning opportunities it affords marginalized groups of students.

As evidenced by these ten students, developmental education has multiple benefits. It provides students with the opportunity to grow academically and develop self-efficacy and self-regulation. Developmental education is the springboard to further academic skills and educational success if carried out appropriately. These ten students had positive experiences with developmental education and successfully maneuvered not only developmental courses, but college level courses and programs alike. These students credit their academic success to earlier successes experienced in developmental courses.

Implications for Educational Policy

This study revealed pertinent information about developmental education, as evidenced by the unexpected outcomes of the study, especially findings pertaining to the positive response the study participants had regarding their developmental experiences. While some developmental students feel threatened by their developmental course placements and resent having to take non-credit bearing courses, the study participants

reported positive experiences with developmental education that in turn positively influenced their performance in subsequent courses. In regard to future developmental educational policy, understanding what created such positive experiences for these developmental students would be paramount to improved developmental education services, especially in a current climate where developmental education is such a highly debatable topic. The experiences of these study participants could be examined in an attempt to identify best practices for developmental education.

Implications for Future Research

Future research is needed regarding successful rural Appalachian community college students, particularly those with developmental placements. Initially, the review of the literature pertaining to this facet of higher education revealed that additional studies are needed to investigate the challenges rural Appalachian community college students face. As a result of this study, it is evident that further research is needed regarding the unexpected outcomes identified to answer the questions of:

- Is there really a difference between being unprepared and underprepared?
- Why do some rural, Appalachian students face familial opposition when seeking higher education?
- How do developmental programs and/or courses impact the development or enhancement of student resilience?
- To what can one attribute a locus of control shift from external to internal for these rural Appalachian community college students?
- Can resilience be acquired or enhanced, and if so, how?

Further, future research is needed to compare these students with students who did not succeed academically to further assess what is different about this particular group of students. As the literature indicates, there are many students who do not persist to graduation, especially at-risk students such as rural Appalachian developmental students. Additionally, quantitative research is needed to address measures of efficacy, maturity and the development of an internal locus of control. Likewise, correlational studies are warranted to address relationships between a plethora of factors to include:

- Maturity and internal locus of control;
- Developmental coursework and increased self-efficacy; and
- Developmental coursework and increased self-regulation.

Closing Thoughts

Resilient developmental students at a rural Appalachian community college were the focus of this qualitative study. Their stories of personal and academic triumph are encouraging. Despite being rural, developmental, and first-generation college students, these students found within themselves the ability to become resilient and obtain academic success. My hope is that their resiliency can be explained and shared with other students in an effort to assist in the development of their own resilience despite being classified as at-risk students. The *lived experiences* of these ten community college students from rural Appalachia tell their stories of success in their own voices.

Their stories, as told in their words and from their lived experiences, showed examples of successful developmental students at a rural Appalachian community college. They faced their own levels of adversity, but that did not hinder their success.

These resilient students had much to overcome while pursuing their academic endeavors; however, they also possessed protective factors which aided them in successfully maneuvering the educational system from developmental course work to college graduation. My hope is that other rural Appalachian students, with or without developmental placements, will internalize the notion that they can succeed in college as well. Additionally, I hope I conveyed the *lived experiences* of these ten community college students from rural Appalachia and effectively told their stories of success.

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APPENDIX A:
STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

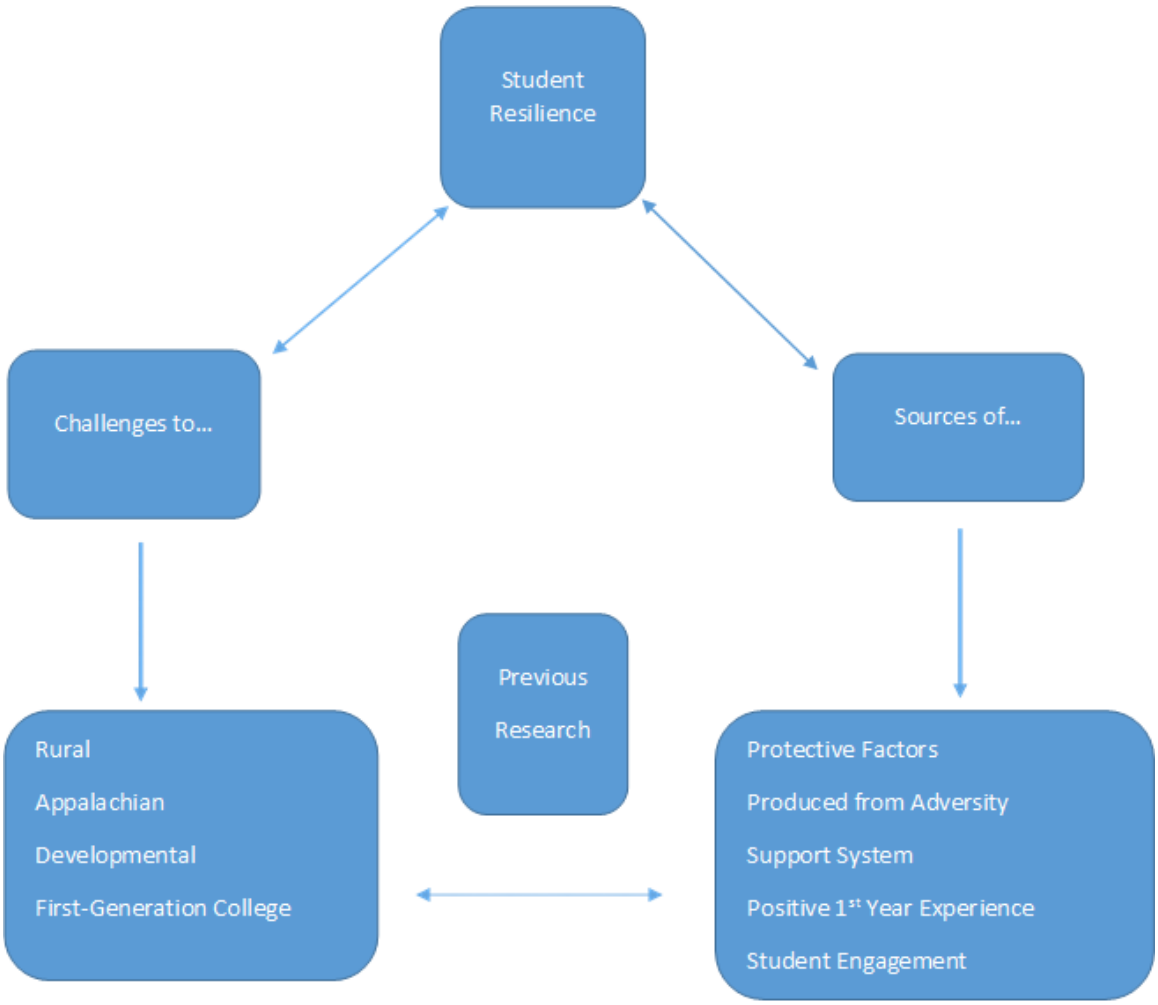
Demographics

1. What was your major?
2. How did you decide on your major?
3. Were you a first generation graduate?
4. Did you receive financial aid?

Questions for Study

5. Tell me what it was like to be a student in your major in your community college?
6. Tell me about your goals?
7. What is most important to you when thinking about your work career?
8. What made it easy to be successful in your program?
9. What made it difficult or most challenging to be a successful student in your program?
10. What educational tasks did you see as challenges to overcome in order to achieve academic success?
11. Tell me how prepared you felt as an incoming college freshman.
12. What educational tasks did you find threatening to your academic success?
13. What were other challenges you saw among your colleagues who were also successful in staying with their program or graduating?
14. What would you like to tell others from your area about how to be a successful student?

APPENDIX B:
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK


Student Resilience
Challenges to...
Sources of...
Rural
Appalachian
Developmental
First-Generation College
Previous Research
Protective Factors
Produced from Adversity
Support System
Positive 1st Year Experience
Student Engagement

VITA

Sandy D. Holbrook
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Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College

Education

Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, KY
ABD/Doctor of Educational Leadership 2013-Present

Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, KY
Master of Arts—Adult Education 2011

University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY
Master of Rehabilitation Counseling 2001

University of Virginia's College at Wise
Wise, VA
Bachelor of Science
Major: Psychology Minor: Sociology 1994

Professional Certifications

Certified Rehabilitation Counselor 2006-2011
Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification
Inactive Status

Memberships

Kentucky Association of Developmental Educators
National Association of Developmental Educators
Phi Theta Kappa
Psi Chi

Awards
20 Year Service Award, SKCTC, 2014
New Horizons Award of Excellence, Faculty Representative, 2008

Presentations
"Student Success Courses: Instruments in Fostering Student Resilience"
TASS Conference, 2014