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THE JOURNAL OF THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
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CONTENTS

**Community College Discipline:
Faculty Perceptions of Role as Literacy Educators..... 5**

*Kristen H. Gregory M.Ed.
Monique Colclough Ph.D.*

Approximately a quarter of community college students are entering college-level courses underprepared for the literacy and critical thinking skills required to be successful in discipline courses (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Discipline faculty are considered experts in their content area and are often not trained in pedagogy and literacy instruction, yet they are faced with meeting the diverse literacy needs of their students while still maintaining high content-focused expectations within their courses. This phenomenological case study investigated community college discipline faculty's perceptions and practices regarding integrating literacy instruction within their disciplines. Data were collected from community college faculty through demographic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In general, the faculty articulated that it was not their role to integrate literacy instruction into their content-specific coursework, yet they often felt they had to in order to meet the needs of their students. The findings provide insight for professional development programs and indicate areas for future research.

**Exploring Student Diversity:
College Students Who Have Autism Spectrum Disorders.....21**

Monique Colclough Ph.D

Higher education literature advises that college students who have autism spectrum disorders overwhelmingly attend community colleges. However, the persistence and retention of college students who have autism spectrum disorders is not well documented. Absent among the existing literature are first-person narratives of college students who have autism. This phenomenological study explored the experiences of college students who have autism spectrum disorders, focusing on the social experiences that impact college persistence and retention. The following research questions guided the study: What are the social experiences of college students who have autism? What role(s) do various social experiences play in the persistence and retention of college students who have autism? This study explores implications for community colleges in concert with institutional responsibility for its diverse body of scholars.

**Needs and Best Practices for Transfer to Our Four-year Institutions:
The Results of Survey Research..... 35**

Patrick K. Smith Ph.D.

Contemporary concerns for college programs focus on the ability of the program to prepare students to become employable upon graduation. For a community college psychology program, that focus is somewhat muted by the fact that many of the community college graduates will transfer to four-year state universities. For this reason, it is imperative for the community college programs to ascertain from those four-year institutions what preparation those transferring students need. This study has captured what fourteen state public university psychology departments desire for transferring students and what they see as lacking in their students transferring from community colleges. The responding department chairs strongly cited basic scholarship skills, a stronger orientation toward critical and scientific thinking, and a professional and career focus in the transferring students.

**Book Review
Review of John Shank's *Interactive Open Educational Resources*..... 43**

Kim Grewe

The use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in higher education is becoming more widespread as college educators explore ways to increase access to college and make a college education affordable. Many books have been written on the topic of OER in higher education. While some of these books address purpose, policy and theoretical considerations, others are more concrete in their discussion of process and product. John Shank's book *Interactive Open Educational Resources: A Guide to Finding, Choosing, and Using What's Out There to Transform College Teaching* is one of the better nuts and bolts guides available to those in higher education interested in exploring the use of OER in their courses and programs. This review analyzes Shank's book and finds that although the guide provides useful advice for collecting, curating, and adopting OER, the book falls a bit short on its promise to transform college teaching.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISCIPLINE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE AS LITERACY EDUCATORS

KRISTEN H. GREGORY, MEd
MONIQUE N. COLCLOUGH, PhD

ABSTRACT

Approximately a quarter of community college students are entering college-level courses underprepared for the literacy and critical thinking skills required to be successful in discipline courses (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). Discipline faculty are considered experts in their content area and are often not trained in pedagogy and literacy instruction, yet they are faced with meeting the diverse literacy needs of their students while still maintaining high content-focused expectations within their courses. This phenomenological case study investigated community college discipline faculty's perceptions and practices regarding integrating literacy instruction within their disciplines. Data were collected from community college faculty through demographic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. In general, the faculty articulated that it was not their role to integrate literacy instruction into their content-specific coursework, yet they often felt they had to in order to meet the needs of their students. The findings provide insight for professional development programs and indicate areas for future research.

Developmental education students are not the only students who are academically underprepared for college. Despite testing out of developmental education courses through their high school GPA or placement tests, many students are entering college-level courses with inadequate literacy.

Keywords: disciplinary literacy, literacy education, higher education, community college

COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISCIPLINE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE AS LITERACY EDUCATORS

Approximately a quarter of students are entering community college underprepared for college-level coursework and enroll in at least one developmental course during their college career (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Developmental education students are not the only students who are academically underprepared for college. Despite testing out of developmental education courses through their high school GPA or placement tests, many students are entering college-level courses with inadequate literacy (reading, writing, and critical thinking) skills (Duff, 2010; Hyland, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998; Tsui, 2002). Thus, discipline faculty are faced with the challenge of meeting the diverse

literacy needs of their students while still maintaining high content-focused expectations within their courses.

Discipline faculty, while credentialed in their content area, often do not have the pedagogical background to integrate literacy instruction into their curriculum (Furco & Moely, 2012; Hammer & Green, 2011; Moje, 2008; Thibodeau, 2008; Tsui, 2002). This presents challenges for faculty when they are faced with students who struggle with reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. In addition to taking developmental courses, students can benefit from literacy support in learning assistance centers. However, researchers argue that such support does not provide enough literacy experiences specific to the disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2006), and faculty can better support students by integrating discipline-specific literacy instruction into the content courses (Heller, 2010; Wingate & Tribble, 2012).

Much research has been conducted on integrating literacy instruction into the content areas at the secondary level, finding that many high school teachers view themselves as both content area and literacy educators (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2008; Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). These content area teachers have higher self-efficacy for teaching literacy (Cantrell et al., 2008; Furco & Moely, 2012; Thibodeau, 2008) and understand the importance and transformative nature of integrating literacy instruction into the discipline (Sangster, Stone & Anderson, 2013).

However, when shifting to higher education, there is a paucity of research on this topic. Heller (2010) argues the importance of integrating discipline-specific literacy instruction into college content courses because these skills are essential in university and professional education. Interestingly, Tsui (2002) found that some college discipline faculty did not believe it was their responsibility to teach literacy skills within their college classroom. In order to better understand this phenomenon in today's community college setting, research is greatly needed to explore faculty's beliefs, experiences, and practices in relation to literacy instruction in their content courses.

METHODOLOGY

Following the ontological belief that there is not one universal truth of faculty perceptions of identity, we adopted a constructivist paradigm for this phenomenological case study. Utilizing a constructivist approach allowed us to represent the subjective voices of the participants so the academic and research community could better understand their views and experiences. Under the umbrella of the constructivist paradigm, phenomenologists value individual and collective experiences, investigate the connection between self and the world, and strive to understand and describe experiences from the participant's point of view (Crotty, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012; Hays & Wood, 2011). In this phenomenological case study, we explored the lived experiences of community college discipline faculty and the meaning behind those experiences in order to better understand the faculty's perceptions of their role as literacy educators.

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to describe community college discipline faculty's perceptions and performance regarding their role as literacy educators within their disciplines. The following research questions are addressed:

- (1) How do community college discipline faculty perceive their role as a literacy educator?
- (2) In what ways do community college discipline faculty integrate literacy instruction into their courses?
- (3) What do community college discipline faculty perceive as the barriers to integrating literacy instruction into their courses?

Context and Participants

In order to gain an understanding of community college discipline faculty's perceptions of their role as literacy educators, we conducted this study at a large, multi-campus, Mid-Atlantic community college. Full IRB approval was granted prior to the start of this study. Through a review of publicly posted syllabi and the first author's prolonged engagement with many faculty members at the college, we were able to identify several faculty members who incorporated intensive reading and writing assignments in their undergraduate social science courses. Three full-time faculty members, representing history, philosophy, economics, and speech communications agreed to participate in this study. The names below are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

The first participant, Scott, came to the community college after working in the business field for ten years. He has taught economics at the college level for nine years and has neither K-12 teaching experience nor any prior education coursework. He requires his students complete reading assignments in the textbook, journal articles, news articles, and credible websites. His students are also required to write a five-page research paper. He typically teaches six classes and has roughly 180 students each semester.

The second participant, Heather, came to the community college upon completing her master's degree program. She has taught communication studies for four years and has neither K-12 teaching experience nor any education coursework. She requires her students complete reading assignments in journal articles, news articles, and credible websites. Her students also are required to write and present three speeches over the course of the semester. She typically teaches six classes and has 165 students each semester.

The third participant, Ruth, came to the community college after teaching elementary school and completing her graduate work. She has taught both online and face-to-face history and philosophy courses for approximately 20 and has no formal education coursework. She requires her students complete reading assignments in the textbook, write several essays, and defend their arguments with logical reasoning and evidence. She typically teaches five classes and has roughly 150 students each semester.

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to data collection, we reduced the data by identifying the topic, research questions, previous literature, access to participants and setting, trustworthiness strategies, and keywords to use as the *a priori* codes. We bracketed our assumptions by completing reflexive journal entries.

Data were collected from each participant through two data sources: a demographic questionnaire and an individual semi-structured interview (see Appendix A). At the beginning of the interview, each participant completed a brief demographic questionnaire regarding his or her education, training, experience as an educator, and specific discipline.

The first author conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants in a private location on campus. During semi-structured interviews, the researcher uses a protocol with questions and follow-up probes. However, the participant is able to influence both the content and structure of the interview through his or her responses. The interviews consisted of 14 questions with connecting probes in three main categories: faculty background and expertise (e.g., Describe your level of preparedness and self-efficacy as it relates to literacy instruction.); faculty perceptions regarding integration of literacy and content (e.g., In your opinion, whose role is it to teach college students literacy skills? Explain your thoughts and reasoning.); and faculty recommendations (e.g. What recommendations, if any, would you give to new faculty in terms of the support system for students in discipline courses who need literacy instruction?).

After conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant, we completed a participant contact summary sheet (see Appendix B), transcribed the interviews, and wrote a brief summary of the interview. We sent it to the participants requesting clarification, additions, or changes. Only one participant, Scott, provided additional thoughts and feedback to clarify some professional development he had completed. The transcript and interview summary were updated accordingly. Additionally, we journaled about any assumptions or biases we had at that point.

Using the previously developed *a priori* codes, we analyzed and manually coded the data in the first transcription. During this analysis, we noted meaning units, themes, subthemes, and participant quotes through the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). We compared the coding of the first transcription using comparative pattern analysis. We collapsed codes based on the themes and subthemes and then created a revised code book to use in the analysis of the second transcription. We continued this iterative process until all transcriptions were coded. We agreed upon a cross-case display to represent the themes and findings across the participants. We wrote a narrative of the findings, showing the essence of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994) by including participant quotes and thick description.

Trustworthiness

We used several strategies to build trustworthiness during this study. First and foremost, we worked together as a research team in order to reduce researcher bias and build triangulation of investigators. The first author had prolonged engagement with many faculty members due to her current professional role at the college. We conducted member checking by including summarizing and clarifying probes during the interviews. We also sent a summary of the interview to the participants and requested verification and feedback. We used thick description in the explanation of the research process and data findings. Finally, we kept a detailed audit trail of all materials and documents pertinent to each stage of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants provided rich data during their interviews in regard to their perceptions of and experiences with integrating literacy instruction into their content courses. The findings are thus organized per research question.

How do community college discipline faculty perceive their role as a literacy educator?

All participants adamantly believed they were content experts and not literacy instructors, despite the fact that they all included some form of literacy instruction and writing support within their classes. Their formal training was in their specific content area, and they perceived they were not fully prepared to teach literacy within their classes. Scott clearly stated, “I’m not an English teacher and I don’t profess to be.” Heather admitted, “I love to read; I read all the time, but as far as teaching someone how to read, I don’t know if I would have the patience for it.” While all three participants provided some literacy support in the classroom, they were not at a point where they perceived themselves as actual literacy educators.

All three participants seemed to have a clear understanding of the definition of literacy instruction when they verbalized their thoughts. Ruth explained, “Reading is really an activity of thinking, not just reading or deciphering words on a page. It’s more thinking about what they’re seeing.” However, as the discussion progressed, it was clear that there was some confusion in terms of how that would look in their classroom, often failing to recognize that literacy instruction included support for reading, writing and thinking. Scott was adamant that literacy instruction should not be mandated by administration and the faculty member should decide when to include literacy instruction. All participants recognized that students have clear literacy needs, both in reading and writing, but they struggled to determine how to best support their students. They all recognized that their lack of training in literacy instruction prevented them from seamlessly integrating literacy instruction into their course.

Scott articulated that it was acceptable in higher education to lack formal education or literacy training, as required in many K-12 settings. He stated, “We’re hired for our subject matter expertise, so I think that’s okay at the college level...I think that what winds up happening is you develop those skills as you go, through trial and error.” Heather suggested that teaching literacy in content classes at the K-12 level was possibly spreading the content teachers too thin. She also recognized that there was much more responsibility placed on the teacher at the K-12 level; whereas, in higher education the student should take more responsibility for learning. With that said, she argued that “there has to be some type of incentive for students to learn themselves. They have to see the benefit...or they are not going to put in the work to make the changes.” Finally, Ruth discussed a disconnect between K-12 and college educational practices, noting that public school systems put too much emphasis on standardized testing and not enough on critical thinking. She concluded that this resulted in her students struggling with utilizing college-level reading, writing, and critical thinking skills.

Two faculty noted that their confidence in their pedagogical and literacy-related decisions improved over their career. Scott shared, “I’m certainly better now than I was nine years ago...and that’s been a result of me adapting and changing to what I see coming in.” He was motivated by his students to learn and progress, stating, “What’s unique about college is your audience isn’t trapped. So if you aren’t good at it or you don’t get good at it, then the market speaks to you and they leave.” Heather had low self-confidence in teaching reading skills but high self-confidence in teaching writing skills, but she attributed this to her level of experience and knowledge of the writing process. Ruth recognized that she was overwhelmed with how difficult teaching was becoming, and she was at a loss as to how to support students’ vocabulary and comprehension skills. In respect to literacy instruction specifically, all three participants felt relatively low self-confidence in ability and knowledge. They unanimously agreed that literacy instruction was mainly the responsibility of English or reading faculty, as indicated by Ruth’s comment: “I really think it’s English. I think that belongs in English. Because in history, it’s a different specialization. So to be asked to teach [English] while teaching history, it doesn’t work.”

In what ways do community college discipline faculty integrate literacy instruction into their courses?

All three participants included literacy instruction in their courses, although two mainly focused on the writing process and one on reading support. Writing support included the use of a rubric, information literacy instruction, written and verbal formative feedback, and summative peer feedback. Reading support included the use of graphic organizers during chapter readings, vocabulary instruction, and comprehension strategies.

Scott provided his students with a guide and rubric to help them organize their research paper. He included several milestones for students to receive feedback from him during the process of completing the research paper. This entailed individual written and verbal formative feedback, which he identified as being

very time consuming. Students also received summative feedback from classmates at the end of the semester. Scott added that he supported students with recognizing credible sources, conducting research, and avoiding plagiarism. Heather also provided her students with a guide and rubric to help them organize their speeches. She incorporated several opportunities for students to provide peer formative feedback as they worked through the writing process. She also provided individual formative feedback to her students. Finally, she recorded the students giving their speeches so they could use it formatively as they prepared for their next speech. Ruth stressed the importance of vocabulary support and worked extensively with her students on building knowledge of discipline-specific terms, both before and during reading. She worked with her students on developing graphic organizers of the content to support comprehension.

In the instances when faculty chose to include literacy instruction in their courses, they cited several reasons. Scott made a clear connection between literacy instruction and the outcomes of both the current course and future coursework: “This is important that I train them to do this [writing] because the next place they go they’re going to get hit with [higher level work].” He felt good about providing writing support because he recognized that the literacy ability of the student was correlated to course success. He also made a connection between the students’ literacy ability and the workforce. He justified supporting students with their writing because “many of my business administration students are looking to go into the business world, and that’s, in my opinion, what they are going to be doing.” Scott was adamant that it was his responsibility to support his students with their writing. He stated, “I feel indebted. I feel like I owe that to them, that I prepare them for that so they don’t get hit with that [when they enter the workforce].”

Heather made a clear connection between literacy skills and entering the workforce and felt that it was important for her to help her students “make the connection of how [writing ability] might be useful to them.” She also made a connection between a student’s writing ability and level of motivation:

I think that [student motivation] comes from being able to see a connection between what they are learning and how they are going to use it. I think that when they can see the connection...when students are goal oriented and feel that they have the ability to achieve those goals, then there is going to be [higher] motivation...if students are either not goal oriented or their goals are not the goals that are focused on in their educational aspect of their lives or where it might be going, then they are not going to be a motivated to learn.

She felt that it was her role to provide opportunities for students to develop their writing and organizational skills within the context of the course’s curriculum so that they would be better prepared to enter the workforce.

Ruth felt that students’ general vocabulary knowledge was poor and she needed to help them build this vocabulary knowledge in order to succeed in the class and the workforce. She stated, “They are not only vocabulary terms, but also

historical terms, so you need to know the meaning.” Without this knowledge, she felt that students would struggle in her class, in their career, and in life. She felt it was her role to help build their vocabulary so that they had a solid foundation for the future.

While there were support systems outside of the classroom between the learning assistance center and the library, the faculty members showed a lack of faith in incorporating these support systems regularly and admitted that they would use them more if they felt it was high in quality. Instead, the faculty members provided one-on-one support for students in class and during office hours when time permitted. On occasion, Heather sent students individually or brought the whole class to the learning assistance center for help with writing, but there were not enough computers to accommodate her whole class. Scott felt that it was the students’ responsibility to seek help in the learning assistance center, and he felt the college could help to raise students’ motivation to attend by providing food during the workshops.

What do community college discipline faculty perceive as the barriers to integrating literacy instruction into their courses?

Participants identified several barriers that impeded their ability to integrate literacy instruction in their courses: course loads, students’ use of time, and faculty’s expectations of student skills.

The biggest barrier was their large course loads (five to six classes and 150-180 students a semester), and the ensuing time needed to prepare, grade and give feedback prevented them from having enough time to reach out to students in need. Heather explained,

There isn’t time for me to seek out students for one-on-one meetings so that if they really need help, they have to come to me. And if they don’t, then it’s very easy for a student to get lost. There is quite literally not the time for me to track them down and say, ‘Hey, why haven’t you come to class?’ or ‘Why haven’t you turned in your outline?’ I can’t do that.

Each of the participants experienced this struggle with time. With their limited time to support students, they felt it was necessary for them to focus on the course content rather than the literacy skills needed for the assignments.

Scott added that the lack of time prohibited him from trying new things and doing more in the classroom. He clarified his frustration: “I’m discouraged. I still do it like I did in the beginning. I still do all these papers and projects and I get overwhelmed by it because there are so many students.” Ruth also felt overwhelmed from the high work load, changing student body, and increasingly demanding administrative duties.

Heather added that the students’ ineffective use of time was a barrier. She attempted to support students’ literacy needs by incorporating peer formative feedback during class but found that students didn’t always use their time wisely: “People who were supposed to be evaluating them, they didn’t really give them any good feedback so they weren’t taking the time to do it...it

was hard to actually get them to still do it.” The lack of space and availability of computer labs also prevented her from doing more formative literacy instruction during class time. Finally, the lack of college funds to support faculty development or alternative instructional options for students was also a barrier.

Another barrier experienced by the faculty was the incoming skill levels of the students. All three participants expected that students coming into college level courses held a certain level of literacy skills. Organization skills, mainly connected to writing assignments, especially were necessary for success in each of their courses. The participants recognized that students were weak in this area and they realized they needed to provide literacy instruction to raise this skill level. This mismatch between expectations and reality was frustrating and discouraging for all three.

One way to combat this barrier of students’ incoming skills is to conduct pre-assessments. Scott felt that faculty assessment of students’ skills was important, although he recognized that this was difficult with his large class sizes. In order to do this effectively, he assigned several milestones for the research paper so he could give individual feedback and support. In terms of reading instruction, he did not check on the students to see if they comprehended the textbook chapters; he expected them to either possess adequate reading skills or know where to go for support. He was able to assess comprehension as the students conducted research and pulled material for their papers.

All three faculty included reading and writing assignments throughout the semester and were able to use those assignments to assess literacy skills. Heather did not assign textbook reading assignments, but she did expect them to possess adequate reading skills when reading articles and websites. She was able to assess their comprehension as they researched and pulled material for their speeches, but she found that students tend to use fact pulling strategies rather than higher level analysis.

Scott and Heather provided a lot of support to help students identify credible sources. In addition, they both found that some students have difficulty paraphrasing information and some students intentionally plagiarize material. In both cases, they found it difficult to provide the level of instruction needed to combat these issues.

Ruth discussed the importance of students completing their reading and writing prerequisites prior to coming into college-level discipline classes. She found it difficult to support students who did not as they struggled with reading, writing and critical thinking skills. As she felt they should have learned this prior to her class, she struggled with whether or not to support their needs in her class.

The final barrier discussed by faculty was the students’ lack of initiative. Each participant felt that students need to show initiative and ask for help as there is not enough time for faculty to follow-up with every student. However, they were discouraged because this was not common practice. In general, they noted that students did not ask for help with reading, but they did ask for help with writing and organization. Scott found that the majority of his students

would attend optional class sessions just to receive feedback from him on their progress on their papers. Ruth could only identify one student who took initiative and went to the learning assistance center.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study supported the current and previous research that states that content teachers often do not have the pedagogical background to integrate literacy instruction into their curriculum (Furco & Moely, 2012; Moje, 2008; Thibodeau, 2008; Tsui, 2002) and that some college discipline faculty do not believe it is their role to teach reading and writing skills within their college classroom (Tsui, 2002). The results of this study begin to fill a gap in the research by providing insight on the perceptions of community college discipline faculty regarding their role as a literacy educator, their literacy practices within their content courses, and their perceived barriers to integrating literacy instruction. Faculty development programs can build upon this research to provide pedagogy and literacy professional development opportunities for discipline faculty.

In order for faculty to respond to the call of Heller (2010) and Wingate and Tribble (2012) to integrate more literacy instruction into their disciplines, they will need to strengthen their role perception as a literacy educator. One way to do this is through professional development and collaboration with literacy experts. The faculty in this study recognized this need, as shown in Ruth's simple statement: "I know I need full training." Her immediate request was for training in how to develop students' critical thinking skills. Professional development workshops focusing on the pedagogy of teaching literacy within their specific discipline would strengthen discipline faculty's knowledge and self-efficacy. Professional learning communities could focus on discipline-specific literacy instruction where faculty could collaborate with other faculty within their discipline, as well as literacy experts, to explore strategies for integrating literacy instruction into the curriculum, course activities, and assignments.

Scott had several ideas for helping faculty develop their ability to provide literacy instruction in the classroom, one being release time for faculty: "I'd love to see in a perfect world where we teach less; how about five classes in the fall and four classes in the spring, and then you promise that you allocate that remaining time to refining your material." He also suggested teaching assistants, but was quick to worry about losing control of his class and students:

How about an assistant to help with [literacy instruction]? And it doesn't have to be my assistant necessarily, but it could be a staff member that service five faculty members and could do office hours, coaching, or grading, you know, some more of the simple stuff. But here again, it's a pride thing. I'm just reluctant to let go of stuff. It's all in my circle and I like it there.

He recognized that he would be interested in pursuing training sessions on incorporating peer formative feedback in his class. With support from colleagues

and trained literacy experts, faculty could explore these ideas and build their knowledge and experience with integrating literacy into their content areas.

More research is certainly needed to investigate the role discipline-specific literacy could play in higher education, the perceptions discipline faculty hold in regard to integrating literacy into their courses, the current literacy practices utilized in discipline courses, the impact discipline-specific literacy instruction has on student motivation and literacy skills, and additional barriers that impede disciplinary literacy. Further, as faculty participate in professional development opportunities that focus on discipline-specific literacy and begin to integrate literacy instruction into their courses, research is needed to determine what impact, if any, this has on faculty's perceived role as a literacy educator, their actual practices within the classroom, and their self-efficacy with such an integration.

LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

The data were collected from three participants, each of whom were chosen through convenience sampling. They were from the same department, college, and geographic area. This presents the risk of not fully identifying the diverse perspectives around integrating literacy instruction. Triangulation of data could have been strengthened by including observations in the classroom to see the amount, level and quality of literacy instruction provided. In addition, being that the first author has a professional relationship with the faculty members, there is the chance that they responded in ways that would be socially and professionally desirable. Additionally, it could become an ethical dilemma if data shed a negative light on the faculty members. When we composed the descriptive narrative the findings, we attempted to use soft and honest language while protecting the integrity of the faculty members.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your current faculty position?
2. What education degrees have you earned?
3. What disciplines have you taught over your career?
4. List the levels and number of years for each of your positions?
5. How many classes and students do you teach each semester?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Faculty Background and Expertise:

1. Describe your educational background and professional experience as it relates to
 - a. Your discipline
 - b. Literacy
 - c. Education/pedagogy
2. Describe any professional development you have participated in related to literacy. When in your career did you participate in this professional development?
3. Describe your level of preparedness and self-efficacy as it relates to literacy instruction.

Faculty Perceptions Regarding Integration of Literacy and Content:

1. When I say literacy instruction, what does that mean to you?
2. Content-area literacy is pushed throughout K-12 schools. Students are accustomed to receiving integrated instruction. Do you think this trend should continue in higher education? Explain. What would be the benefits? What would be the drawbacks?
3. In your opinion, whose role is it to teach college students literacy skills? Explain your thoughts and reasoning.
4. Explain your course expectations for class assignments as it relates to literacy.
 - a. Level/ability of students
 - b. Reading assignments
 - c. Writing assignments
5. In your literacy-related assignments, how do you convey your literacy expectations about the assignments?
6. For students who need support with literacy components of these assignments, what resources, if any, do they have (in and out of class)?

7. In thinking back to your definition of literacy instruction, what literacy instruction, if any, do you provide in the classroom?
8. Has there been a time when it has not been relevant to incorporate literacy instruction in your class?

Faculty Recommendations:

1. What barriers, if any, impact your ability to integrate literacy into your course work? How do you overcome these barriers?
2. What do you perceive as the general consensus amongst your colleagues in terms of integrating literacy and content instruction?
3. What recommendations would you give to new, inexperienced faculty in terms of
 - a. Student literacy needs in discipline courses
 - b. Support system for students who need literacy instruction
 - c. Strategies to use in the classroom to develop literacy skills alongside discipline content

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Contact:

Date:

Today's Date:

1. What were the main issues or themes that stuck out for you during this contact?
2. What discrepancies, if any, did you note in the interviewee's response?
3. Was there anything else that stuck out as salient, interesting, or important during this contact?
4. How does this contact compare to other data collections for this study?

EXPANDING STUDENT DIVERSITY: COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO HAVE AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

MONIQUE N. COLCLOUGH, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders in education is longstanding, albeit almost exclusive of the first-person experiences of college students. Two- and four-year institutions each report 2% of the surveyed student body self-identify with autism (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The literature does not capture the first-person experiences of college students who have autism at the same prevalence of K-12 students on the spectrum. This gap limits the basis by which colleges and universities can meet the student development and academic needs of this diverse body of scholars. Because of this gap educators should be cautious about assuming that college students who have autism are homogenous, instead recognizing

Specific to higher education, approximately 80% of students with autism attend community colleges (Wei et al., 2014). Actionable information on how to support college students who have autism that is driven by personal narratives is largely missing from postsecondary education literature.

the diversity in student ability, need, and educational experiences. To capture the experiences of collegiate life in the context of college students who have autism, this phenomenological study focused on the social experiences that encourage persistence in college.

Specific to higher education, approximately 80% of students with autism attend community colleges (Wei et al., 2014). Actionable information on how to support college students who have autism that is driven by personal narratives is largely missing from postsecondary education literature. The existing literature focuses heavily on quantitative data regarding matriculation, and narratives from accessibility support services staff (Brown & Coomes, 2016). Also missing from the literature is discussion about how college students who have autism navigate the social idiosyncrasies of college life, specifically those idiosyncrasies that influence persistence and retention, particularly peer interactions, the role of faculty and/or staff mentoring, and readiness for career and/or workforce opportunities. National Longitudinal Transition Study data shows that within eight years of high school graduation young adults who have autism matriculate to higher education as both community college and university students (Roux et al., 2015). Specifically, almost 46% of young adults solely enroll at a community college, while approximately 24% of young adults attend both a

community college and a four-year institution during their post-secondary career (Roux et al., 2015). Understanding the social experiences of college students who have autism could spotlight K-12 transition planning and positively impact retention, providing persistence strategies for higher education's response to this emerging body of college students (Kelley & Joseph, 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Encouraging the exploration of student development theory beyond anecdotal references, Astin's (1999) work on involvement and student development theory birthed the framework for examining the relationships among persistence, student involvement, and success. Identified by Astin as a "unifying construct" (1999, p. 527), student development theory provides the foundation for student life/success initiatives, inclusive of persistence and retention. Among several environmental components that can shape a student's college experience, and subsequently retention, are participation in campus athletics, honors programs, undergraduate research opportunities and faculty mentorship, and being involved in student leadership or government. These environmental factors are important to note as they provide context for college student campus engagement.

Engstrom and Tinto (2008) expand on Astin's (1999) work by explicitly linking institutional accountability to student access, equity, and success. Writing about student persistence and retention for low-income students Engstrom and Tinto offered that learning communities could serve as spaces that help low-income students foster social engagement with peers. Engstrom and Tinto's assertion about learning communities and institutional commitments can also be transposed to the diverse community of college students who have autism. The Asperger Initiative at Mercyhurst University (Carlotti, 2014) accomplishes this through a living and learning community for 25 students in a residential setting. The Asperger Initiative facilitates social events, and a student support group led by a graduate student mentor, further supporting student persistence and completion at Mercyhurst.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Institutions are accountable for their environment related to preparedness and appreciation of diverse learners. The environment college students with autism are asked to adapt into needs improvement to support and develop positive social experiences. Less than half of the institutions that provide generalized accessibility support services also provide engagement and social support services (Brown & Coomes, 2016). With approximately 80% of college students who have autism pursuing post-secondary education at community colleges at some point, we must acknowledge and strategically support college students with diverse cognitive and social abilities, encouraging their involvement and subsequently their supporting persistence and retention (Couzens et al., 2015; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Longtin, 2014; Milem & Berger, 1997).

Understanding the social experiences and perceptions of interactions with peers, faculty, and administrators for college students who have autism is the first of many steps in strengthening the student experience. Understanding how adult learners navigate scenarios where social capital is at stake provides context for their future work environment, influencing outreach, and programs created for career preparation (Wehman et al., 2014).

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative inquiry, specifically this study's phenomenological design, records the diverse lived experiences, backgrounds, and identities of the study's participants. As an alternate to the deficit approach of research centered on the challenges or accommodations of college students with autism, this person-first descriptive study explored the social experiences of college students who have autism and the impact of these experiences on persistence and retention (Chown & Beaven, 2012; Gobbo & Schmulsky, 2012, 2014; McKeon et al., 2013). The following research questions were a guide to the study: What are the social experiences of college students who have autism? What role(s) do various social experiences play in the persistence and retention of college students who have autism? As previously identified, high school graduates who have autism attend both community colleges and four-year institutions at a rate of almost 24% (Roux et al., 2015). It is important to note this enrollment trend as this phenomenological study was conducted at a public, urban, research-intensive, doctoral-granting institution in the southeastern United States during fall 2015 and spring 2016. To address exclusion, the inclusion criterion for the sample population was self-identification with autism for enrolled students and recent college graduates who completed degrees within the previous six months. Undergraduates who self-identified with autism spectrum disorders were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews by way of campus advertisement on the institution's daily student announcements via email, university televisions located throughout the student center and academic spaces, partnership with regional autism advocacy organizations, and the institution's accessibility support services staff. The sample site was selected as a result of the diversity in course delivery for both non-degree and degree-seeking students, which tend to appeal to diverse learning needs (Remy & Seaman, 2014).

Data Collection

During fall semester 2015, almost 800 undergraduate and graduate students were registered with the sample site's Office of Educational Accessibility, of which 3.5% or approximately 28 students self-identified with autism and/or Asperger's Syndrome. After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, potential participants were recruited through the Office of Educational Accessibility, campus advertising through student and faculty announcements, and collaboration with several on- and off-campus partners also working with students who have autism, including two regional autism societies and a national autism advocacy organization. It is important to note that other institutions have

found success in partnering with autism societies and advocacy organizations to connect with college students. As a best practice, a snowball sampling method was also used to identify other participants who met the inclusion criteria. To confirm interest in the study each interested student completed a brief Qualtrics survey after responding to the call for participants.

Beginning in fall 2015, data collection persisted until spring 2016 when saturation was met. The purposeful sampling method and snowball sampling strategy yielded five participants (N = 5) (Table 1). It is important to note that five additional students showed interest in participating in the research, but were ultimately unable to commit to participation. It is believed that the diversity in communication and social experiences, can lead to stigmas associated with autism, thereby increasing the number of participants reticent to engage in this inquiry and others (Haas et al, 2016; Shattuck et al, 2014). Additionally this study's participant yield is aligned with a mixed methods needs analysis study that also had five participants (White et al., 2016).

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with the five participants, with the interviews ranging from 30 to over 90 minutes. Each participant was interviewed at least once, resulting in 307 minutes of participant data. Interviews were held in various locations on and off campus, including the university library, academic classrooms, and through a synchronous format, Skype. The variance in interview length reflects the diversity in participant communication styles and abilities, including those with elaborate responses, as well as a participant with speech disfluency.

Created to capture the research questions without directing the participants to focus on a singular element of their collegiate experience, 12 semi-structured interview questions were intended to be a conversation guide. The interview questions were compromised of main questions and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), and included the following:

When did you begin to think about attending college?

Were there any transition plans or programs that you participated in prior to enrolling in college courses?

How do you describe your social experiences as a college student?

Do you feel engaged with the social events/offerings on and off campus?

Are there any significant success or lessons that you've learned, and if so how would you describe them?

Following the foundation of qualitative inquiry, each transcribed interview was initially analyzed using a *priori* codes developed from the literature and previous pilot study. Simultaneous data collection and analysis were used to take advantage of qualitative research's features, while intentionally identifying patterns and textural themes among the data (Miller & Salkind, 2002; Rubin & Rubin 2012).

Specifically, a *priori* codes were used to analyze and code the transcribed audio data line by line, identifying common themes, pertinent participant quotations, and unique language, creating patterns of loosely identified thick descriptions that were used for comparative pattern analysis. The *a priori* coding assisted in identifying etic codes or categories, expanding and revising the initial codebook, and creating narrative themes and textural data for the final codebook (Hays & Singh, 2012). The final codebook and cross-case analysis were a reflection of the comprehensive data identified throughout the data analysis, becoming the foundation for a comprehensive narrative of the diversity of student perspectives, experiences, and recommendations for supporting college students who have autism.

To memorialize salient thoughts and experiences, each participant interview was paired with a contact summary sheet, which was used to record observations and experiences immediately after each interview. Reflexive journaling also bracketed any researcher subjectivity. Confirmability was demonstrated through member checking. Two weeks after each interview an executive summary of keywords and themes, less than 500 words, in a bulleted format, was presented as a memo to each participant for their review and feedback. Responses to the memos were used as new additional data.

Participants

Pseudonyms were used to identify the participants and protect their anonymity. The participants self-identified with autism and confirmed receipt of diagnosis by a medical professional during their educational career. The confirmation of diagnosis is important to reflect as one participant, Mary, shared that there is internal community discord amongst persons who have autism around the notions of "having your papers". Ranging in age from 19-36 years, two participants, Mary and John, attended both a community college and four-year institution during their postsecondary educational career. Notably, Don and Mary were diagnosed in adulthood and after enrollment in college courses, adding to the rich diversity of student experiences. Four participants were male, one female, and two participants identified as a person of color, i.e., Hispanic/Latino and Biracial/Multiracial, or Asian American.

Table 1

Research Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Age of Diagnosis	Accommodations	Classification	Prior Attendance
Mary	F	White	35	33	None	Alumni	2-year College
John	M	White	26	1st Grade	Extended Time & Recording Rights	Sophomore	2-year College
Gary	M	Hispanic/ Latino & Biracial/ Multiracial	20	9 or 10	Extended Time & Quiet Testing Room	Sophomore	None
Norris	M	Asian American	19	7	Extended Time	Freshman	None
Don	M	White	36	32	None	Alumni	None

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

There were seven themes in the participant narratives about their post-secondary experiences, five of which were relative to both the community college and four-year institution setting: (a) campus engagement, (b) noise, (c) faculty engagement, (d) intentional peer/classmate interactions, and (e) romantic experiences. What seems to be a simple decision to attend a campus event, as in a lecture, pep rally, or athletic event, can actually be a more complex decision for college students who have autism. “John” expressed his sentiment about campus engagement: “As it is...I go, I come here to learn. I don’t care about the sports. Never have, never will...” (John, personal communication, February 18, 2016). Half of the participants shared they are either intentionally not engaged or cautiously engaged with social events on campus, due to the size of the crowd, potential noise levels, general disinterest, and anxiety associated with being spread too thin or being unable to focus appropriately on academics. Mary shared that her decisions to attend social events are based on her sensory needs, preferences, and her position on disconnectedness with what she believes is the standard identity of an undergraduate student—that is, being incredibly social, eager to attend campus events among throngs of other people, and willing to participate in athletic events.

Campus Engagement: The diversity in campus engagement is further illustrated by Norris’ earnest hesitancy to disrupt the rhythm of his academic focus, which was positively influencing his persistence and retention. When asked if there were any things that he wished were different, among them taking additional Advanced Placement credits in high school, he responded that like other college students he wished he was able to get more involved on campus and simultaneously do well academically.

Noise: Likewise, noise was linked closely to the decision to not engage socially with campus. The decibel range at campus events and the lack of control over noise presented a concern for some participants. Mary illustrated this best when sharing two questions she asks of herself before considering attending an event: “Is there going to be a lot of noise? Okay. Am I able to manage it? If not, don’t go...if I could change anything it would be all the heavy emphasis on participating in all of these things” (Mary, personal communication, November 30, 2015). Mary can trace the conscious avoidance of noise back to her adolescence, age 12 specifically, when she began to separate herself from people and scenarios that were excessively noisy.

Faculty Engagement: Although intentionally reluctant and selective to engage socially, participants recall their relationships with faculty with fondness and admiration for their support of academic success in individual courses, as well as overall degree completion. Faculty engagement was a complement to intentionality concerning peer and classmate interactions. Talking with faculty often began with course content and extended to a mentee/mentor relationship as the participants progressed toward degree completion. Building connections with faculty around their major of study and academic achievements furthered student connection to campus.

Intentional Peer/Classmate Interactions: Don and Gary specifically talked about purposefully creating friendships to either support academic achievement or create a social identity. Familial support, connections with faculty, and friendships with other peers outside of campus were also influential in the participants’ persistence and retention. Established in a high school Advanced Placement program, Gary was a member of a group of three who built an intentional academic and social support network as college students: “...we just help each other out, you know, like we’ll help each other study...” (Gary, personal communication, February 18, 2016). Don’s creativity led him to develop a campus-based disc jockey radio show dedicated to disco music; sharing his goal to be extreme and easily recognizable on campus in lieu of just blending in with the student body.

Romantic Experiences: Participants also referenced unintended romantic relationships during their college career. Although none of the students attended college with the hope or intention of meeting their significant other, sexual identity and orientation also played a role in social experience. The participants introduced the presence of romantic experiences or relationships as an element of their social interactions with peers, on and off campus. The impact of learning how to communicate, understanding social cues, and becoming aware of communication preferences was important in understanding the relationships of the participants. Two of the students recalled talking individually to women with whom they had interest and the relative ease in which a conversation or an invitation to lunch would be extended. In retrospect, the students recalled the conversations as a natural event and did not frame establishing personal or romantic relationships within the context of being a college student with autism.

Discussion of Findings

College students with autism spectrum disorders face a unique array of scenarios that both directly and indirectly impact their readiness and success in higher education. First-person narratives from a body of diverse college students who have autism provide insight into the complexities of identity based on their narration, social experiences, and relationships with others. This includes identity as a college student, as a person who has autism, a person of color, and a member of the LGBTQIA community.

Social Experiences

In relation to the first research question posed in this study, participants were asked about their social experiences as college students who have autism. The participants shared that in most instances they choose not to engage intentionally, due in part to the challenges noise and crowds presented at campus events. The unpredictability of a crowd's size, behavior, and decibels discourage attendance at events that are traditionally seen as the bedrock for the student experience. Astin's (1999) work on the intersection of environment, student identity, persistence, and student involvement is illustrated in the connections participants made with faculty. Likewise, the connection with faculty appears to build a foundation of support and affirmation that encourages persistence, personal exploration, and academic growth (Milem & Berger, 1997). An interpretation of Astin's (1999) work identifies the forgotten essence of his contribution to student development theory, which is engaging with and experiencing campus life, and those experiences becoming the foundation for a student's expanding adult identity.

In a broader context, the participants' social experiences were inclusive of intentionally crafted and maintained friendships with people off campus, collegial friendships with faculty, and romantic relationships. The participants did not use campus as their hub for communication, connection, nor identity, yet were still having incredibly valuable social experiences as college students who have autism. It is unknown if the intentional disconnect with campus was due in part to the complex nature of autism itself, or, if the disconnect was the product of a lifetime of being forced to engage with environments that do not take into account diverse abilities and needs (Ne'eman, 2010).

Student frustration with this expectation is evident as stated by John:

There's all of these expectations to participate in all of the stuff and these things...it's almost as if social interaction is demanded at times... and if not, uh, then people think, they'll think you're just one of those people. (John, personal communication, November 30, 2015)

Social Experiences Relevant to Persistence and Retention

As evidenced by this sample population, social experiences do not appear to influence persistence and retention—answering the second research question. Four of the participants' persistence and retention is influenced by additional factors including parental support, the proximity of the institution to family,

and the opportunity to reside at home, thereby eliminating on-campus housing expenses. Although there was a natural ease each of the students described when talking with their instructors, none of the students identified faculty engagement as the primary factor in their persistence and retention. Instead, Don, Mary, and Norris described their interactions with faculty as positive influences, noting in particular the ease of conversation and relatability. John, who attended both a community college and four-year institution, shared the following:

I generally have a social relationship with most of my instructors...I walk and stay after and ask my instructor questions and sometimes that will lead to conversation that are related to the question and we kinda just get to know each other that way. (John, personal communication, November 30, 2015).

The diversity within the social experiences of college students who have autism is important and valuable to understand. While the persistence and retention of this study's participants does not appear to be influenced by their social experiences, it is critical nonetheless to understand what experiences students are having, what experiences they are avoiding altogether on campus, and the types of experiences they are creating for themselves throughout their college enrollment.

Implications for Practice

College students who have autism are attending community colleges at increasing rates (Roux et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2014). Because of this, community colleges are rich opportunities for strategic degree completion initiatives, strategic workforce development, and baccalaureate transfer pathways. Institutions are accountable for their environment related to preparedness and appreciation of diverse learners. True to institutional mission, community colleges represent opportunities of access and equity for college students who have autism. A question worth exploring: how can community colleges (which often have restrictive budgets) prepare for, and respond to, the rich diversity within this body of students?

Peer institutions across the country have responded by partnering with regional advocacy groups. As an example, Howard Community College partners with the Howard County Autism Society on Project Access, a K-12 initiative that creates a seamless transfer experience for high school students. Montgomery Community College collaborates with the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services to facilitate the DORS-Pathways Program. Here in the Commonwealth of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University has partnered with community colleges in the Tidewater region to meet the needs of students participating in the ACE-IT in College program. What other collaborative efforts can be explored to strategically attract, retain, and credential college students who have autism?

As described by students who attended both community colleges and universities the role of faculty connections influences the collegiate experience. Conversations

with faculty add to the cultural experiences of college students with respect to their autism identity and any other comorbid diagnosis. With the proliferation of well-crafted first-year experience (FYE) initiatives and community college to university bridge programs it is unclear what influence that earlier summer connections to faculty advisors could have on further familiarizing college campus culture, reinforcing purpose, and academic identity. Similarly, the participants discussed disability services, almost exclusively to provide accommodations, yet their role in the persistence and retention of college students who have autism can be explored more explicitly (Robertson, 2010). Specifically, what type, if any, of case management techniques do disabilities services staff provide students who are on the autism spectrum?

Lastly, an opportunity for college response exists in the creation of peer support or social groups for college students who have autism. Recommendations for a peer support or social group include having a staff member lead the logistical/administrative output, in part because students would fail to stay organized or motivated long term. There are institutions that have peer-facilitated groups as a safe space for students to socialize and develop friendships or explore romantic relationships (Carlotti, 2014). As best practices on how these groups function are identified institutions must inquire internally, how, and if, they are encouraging the development of social capacity that will provide context for job searches and employment (Wehman et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

This research study was purposefully created to capture the voices of college students who have autism spectrum disorders, focusing on the strengths and layered diversity within the autism community, instead of approaching differing ability from a deficit lens. To do this, two research questions were developed: What are the social experiences of college students who have autism? What roles do various social experiences play in the persistence and retention of college students who have autism?

Although the five participants were recruited at a public university in the southeast, two participants began their post-secondary career at a community college. Their enrollment affirmed that within eight years of high school graduation, young adults who have autism matriculate to higher education as both community college and university students.

In most instances the participants chose not to engage with campus-based social experiences due to challenges that noise and crowds presented. Yet, the participants intentionally developed social connections outside of campus with friends and family. It is these social connections that appear to influence college student persistence and retention. Equally instrumental, participants recognized the positive impact college faculty had on their undergraduate experience, self-confidence, and awareness as students and alumni. As access to post-secondary education continues to expand, the study's findings present opportunities for further research into retention and institutional support for community college students who have autism spectrum disorders. Opportunities for additional research into the professional development of community college

accessibility services staff in supporting college students who have autism, and the professional development of faculty who will teach and advise community college students with differing abilities and career development goals exist.

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Monique's scholarship examines neurodiversity in higher education, focusing on college students who have autism and their collegiate experiences.

NEEDS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR TRANSFER TO OUR FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS: THE RESULTS OF SURVEY RESEARCH

PATRICK K. SMITH, PH.D.

ABSTRACT

Contemporary concerns for college programs focus on the ability of the program to prepare students to become employable upon graduation. For a community college psychology program, that focus is somewhat muted by the fact that many of the community college graduates will transfer to four-year state universities. For this reason, it is imperative for the community college programs to ascertain from those four-year institutions what preparation those transferring students need. This study has captured what fourteen state public university psychology departments desire for transferring students and what they see as lacking in their students transferring from community colleges. The responding department chairs strongly cited basic scholarship skills, a stronger orientation toward critical and scientific thinking, and a professional and career focus in the transferring students.

Keywords: phenomenology, teaching objectives, scholarship skills, community colleges, student transfers, career focus, college psychology

In today's political climate, both economic needs and mounting student loan debt in default have led to a focus on college instruction and degree programs taking on serious accountability for their graduates actually becoming employed upon completion of their education. The pressure, coming from both the White House and state legislatures, has awakened the conversation of employability in both certificate-focused non-degree programs and academic liberal arts four-year degree structures. Community colleges, as providers of both non-credit and credit education, feel both types of pressures and have turned their focus on the effectiveness of their efforts. In particular, for a community college psychology department that offers no particular psychology major, this focus translates to the question of how well it can prepare its students for transfer to four-year institutions, whether those transfer students will become eventual psychology majors or will simply use their community college psychology learning experiences for elective credits.

According to the Virginia Community College System website (Impact, 2016), there are over 262,000 students attending the Commonwealth's community colleges, representing about 60% of all state undergraduates. About 56% of community college graduates are currently in transfer programs to one of the Commonwealth's more than 25 public and private four-year institutions which share guaranteed admission agreements with the community colleges (Impact, 2016). According to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (2016), 7,395 students alone attended four-year public institutions in 2015 after earning their associate degrees at a Virginia community college. These statistics represent a heavy responsibility for the community colleges in general and for our community college psychology department in particular, leading to the need to open up and maintain effective communication between the community colleges and the four-year institutions in order that proper educational objectives are met and students are adequately prepared both for the four-year classroom and later employment.

THE LITERATURE

The goal of preparing students for transfer and later employment begins with an understanding of learning objectives. The literature on general educational objectives for the higher education classroom tells an interesting story of the contrast between instructors' and students' expectations for these objectives. In their classic study, Betts and Liow (1993) developed a list of 13 instructional objectives for higher education, which they presented to instructors and students to be ranked. The instructors favored analytical thinking and understanding the main concepts, as well as developing problem solving skills and an interest in the discipline, as the four most important learning objectives generally. On the other hand, the students themselves sought preparing for a career and developing practical application skills as the most important, followed by thinking analytically and understanding the main concepts (Betts and Liow, 1993). As the four least important objectives, the instructors ranked gathering factual information, preparing for exams, developing specialized knowledge, and organizing time and ideas, while the students found exam preparation to be relatively important, replacing it on the low priority list with developing independent learning skills (Betts and Liow, 1993). It is interesting how students seemed to orient their learning experiences toward future use in careers and were less oriented toward achieving "good student status," while faculty are more concerned with practices that could be centered on that idea of what it means to be a "good student".

In 1999, Bonner studied the alignment of teaching methods with objectives in a specific discipline, adhering to Gagne's taxonomy of learning and positing the importance of using a variety of methods in the classroom in order to match specific expectations of the students concerning their learning objectives. While the discipline she studied was accounting and the methods described rather more pertinent to twentieth century pedagogy focusing on recall and not twenty-first century heutagogy and andragogy, Bonner (1999) stressed the same importance of developing the cognitive strategies and analytical thinking encouraged in Betts and Liow's (1993) study. Again, this spoke of an ideal for what being a good student entails.

In comparison with and contrast to the literature of the twentieth century, contemporary studies of learning and teaching objectives in higher education seem to fall into four distinct categories. O’Keefe, Lopez, Xu, and Lall (2014) analyzed business class pedagogies, focusing on two areas of student development: understanding and skills. Developing understanding focused inward as the student should master the fundamental concepts, roles, relationships, and sources of information pertinent to the discipline, while developing the skills requisite to success in the career field focuses outward (O’Keefe, et al, 2014). This inward-outward dichotomy challenges us to turn from a presupposed ideal of good scholarship to focus also on a career orientation. With this focus, Chun (2010) took a contrasting perspective to O’Keefe’s (2014) focus on the inward fundamentals, one distinctly cognitive, in emphasizing the importance of preparing students for success through exposing them to authentic tasks and real-life content with inquiry and problem solving. His list of objectives included the importance of taking multiple perspectives, critical evaluation, evidence analysis, dispassionate reasoning, and informed decision-making (Chun, 2010). Fryer, Ginns, and Walker (2014) posited that students’ internally focused, mastery orientation toward learning resulting from opportunities to practice goal framing and exposure to student-oriented instructors as models, will result in positive long-term effects on study and learning effort and later achievement. Geitz, Brinke, and Kirschner (2015) elaborated on this idea of the mastery orientation toward learning concluding that sustainable feedback to the students, in which they are actively involved in their own assessment and feedback, provides a significant effect on their perceived mastery.

Learning objectives also go beyond the conceptual and cognitive foci, however. In their research on international education as essential to nation building, Abari, Oyetola, and Okunuga (2014) described the three-fold objectives of instruction as containing the dissemination and teaching of information and the involvement of the student in his or her community, as well as the development of research in the disciplines. This focus on community involvement could mirror O’Keefe, et al. (2014) in their focus on developing useful and effective skills, as well as point toward Murray’s (2015) research on student transformation and development. Ozolins (2015) also took the same tack on learning in terms of having an effect on the larger society of the world in describing effect as a means of students’ developing wisdom. Wisdom development took the form of three levels of understanding: the self, relationships with others, and moral direction and choice (Ozolins, 2015).

Learning should address self-development, as well as social development. In describing a special development program at the Virginia Commonwealth University, Murray (2015) took instructional objectives inward, positing that higher education should give students the opportunity to build personal confidence and skills with written and oral communication, leadership, metacognition, and collaboration. Turner (2014) defined this confidence as self-belief, describing how successful students believe that ability can be improved, they can be successful, and their learning environment will allow for improvement and success. These perspectives should challenge the contemporary professor to meet these objectives and facilitate his or her students meeting them as well.

Purpose of this Study

Based on the literature, there is a consistent belief that students should be developed and transformed by their learning opportunities, although there is a diversity of perspectives on what that may look like. For this reason, this study will seek to uncover what psychology instructors in the state's four-year public institutions see as important factors of student development, both in what should be required and what is lacking in our contemporary transfers.

METHODOLOGY

Inspired and challenged by the needs of the four-year institutions, the contemporary emphasis on job preparation, and the literature on the multiple objectives of higher education learning, this researcher developed a small qualitative study to tap into the lines of communication between the psychology department of Thomas Nelson community college and those of the Commonwealth's 14 public universities. Because of the potentially nebulous list of educational objectives, especially those focused on an ideal of how a good student or scholar should behave and think, instead of focusing on the objective reality of the classroom, I chose to attempt to capture the subjective realities of practitioners of the university classroom through a phenomenological study, focusing on the practical observations and ideas of the psychology instructors themselves. The phenomenological approach is most appropriate here because the instructors are those directly interacting with the community college students; their perspectives are essentially more valuable than those with no practical stake in the students' experiences.

In focusing on college psychology programs, my purpose was to start with an open-ended query of what each department chair considered the main objective of an associate degree level of educational preparation, and then to provide a forum to consider what areas are most lacking in community college transfers and what specific educational practices might be undertaken by faculty. I undertook this query in a mass e-mailing to all the psychology chairpersons in the state's four-year public institutions. The questions were as follows:

1. What knowledge and or skills would you like to see community college transfer students possess in order to be ready to learn in your program?
2. In what areas do you find community college transfer students most lacking?
3. Do you have any suggestions as to what you would like us in the community colleges to be doing?

One of the perceived complaints of higher education practitioners is the lack of time to carry out face-to-face interactions with their own colleagues and students. For this reason, I chose to employ open-ended email interviewing as a methodology instead of seeking formal appointments to sit and discuss the questions with the department chairs. As to potential ambiguity in the questions and the invalidation of collected data resultant in a diversity of

interpretations of questioned concepts, the choice was made to forgo any focus groups that might have established more reliability in the questioning. The reason for this is to provide opportunities for the participants to take the questions in diverse and personal directions and therefore provide useful insight to those using the resulting data.

RESULTS

Mirroring the literature on learning objectives in higher education, the survey results showed a distinct concern for both professional preparation and the importance of the skills and knowledge associated with college psychology. The answers fell into four general categories of responses: skills, focus, attitude, and knowledge of psychology.

As far as learning skills in undergraduate psychology, our four-year universities desire math and writing skills above the others. Responses concerning writing skills addressed such areas as research paper construction, familiarity with the APA format, facility with diction and theses, and information literacy. Particularly cited in the results was the apparent poverty of essay construction ability in our community college students.

As far as math skills are concerned, college psychology programs cite a desire for students to have some understanding of and experience with carrying out research and statistical analyses. More specifically, quite a few programs expressed a need for students to approach problems analytically and critically, in keeping with the information literacy mentioned above. One school even mentioned the lack of general quantitative skills in transferring students, though the exact meaning of this is unclear.

Concerning specific skills in and knowledge of psychology, we in community colleges are encouraged to empower our students with a solid foundational knowledge of psychology in all of its perspectives, especially a familiarity with research methods, cognition, and perception. Some responses called for students to have a wider variety of non-clinical courses, like industrial/organizational and human factors perspectives, but most specified that students transferring to four-year institutions should have three solid foundational level psychology courses, like a basic or introductory, a developmental, and a biological/research course, instead. The implication of these responses is that students who dabble in specific branches of psychology, like abnormal, social, or personality, alone will only have to repeat these courses for higher level credit and will suffer without a firmer foundational understanding of the discipline.

In what could be categorized “student focus,” many responses described the importance of employing solid critical thinking in all areas of student learning. This is reflected in the specific skills of information literacy and analytical thinking cited above, and proposed in a few responses calling for students to take a more scientific approach to answering questions and testing their hypotheses.

Implying particular attitudes needed for university-level classes, many psychology department heads called for community colleges to prepare students more effectively with study skills, in particular, a more scholarly attitude toward studying. The implication expressed here was clearly that we need to require students to make connections within and between the disciplines and to solve problems rather than simply memorizing facts. This appreciation of a deeper level of learning would then translate into a more serious effort to read the literature, master writing and research, and focus more effectively on processing, connecting, and analyzing.

Another specific attitude expressed in the results focused on ethics. The question raised is whether we require students to practice ethical behavior in learning, considering ethics both in their interactions with others and in their understanding of the discipline of psychology. Is the students' focus only on earning certain grades in their classes rather than becoming the practitioners of conscientiousness and empathy at the heart of psychology? This was also expressed as the question of whether our psychology graduates fully understand why they are studying psychology.

The question of understanding the purpose of studying psychology implies more than an interest in the discipline and connects with the literature on the central purposes of higher education. More than half of the responses cited that our community college students transferring to four-year universities need a career focus. Too many students come to a psychology program with no idea of what practicing psychology involves or how to get there.

CONCLUSIONS

Tentative Hypotheses

From the data, I would propose the following tentative hypotheses for further study:

1. Community college students need to improve their writing ability, especially in terms of mechanics, researching, and information literacy.
2. Community college students need to improve their computational skills, especially in the areas of research and statistical analysis.
3. Community college psychology students need to improve their knowledge of research methods, cognition, and perception in addition to their basic understanding of the perspectives and definitions of psychology.
4. Community college students need to improve their critical thinking skills and adopt a more scientific approach to analysis and drawing conclusions.
5. Community college students need to improve their study skills.
6. Community college students need to understand and practice ethical behavior in their targeted disciplines.

Limitations

While the diversity of data collected was informative and challenging, the fact that the number of responses was but 12 emails served as a serious limitation to drawing practical conclusions. It would not be difficult to surmise that other opinions may provide a wider array of potential hypotheses and further insight. The advantage of the phenomenological perspective is the reliance on the experiences and insight of the people who are actually involved in the context being studied, so more responses would give more insight. As mentioned above, also, it is difficult for college instructors to take time to answer questions, especially open-ended ones as were provided in this research. There stands, therefore, the limitation that the answers provided could have been hurried, ill-conceived, or downright deceptive due to individual time constraints or daily mood.

Future Potential Research

This research could and should be replicated with an attempt to secure a wider range of perspectives through another series of emails. Another possible research venture could involve taking the listed answers and expanding them into a checklist that could be evaluated using a more quantitative analysis.

Final Thoughts

From the data collected from these surveys, it is easy to understand the pressures we in higher education feel to make our students' educational experiences useful in helping them become to one day be employed. This is not, however, just limited to covering the basics of knowledge and skills in our disciplines. We must also prepare the whole student to become an ethical, hardworking, critically thinking, problem solving practitioner of our disciplines. We must get beyond teaching facts and provide intellectual exercises leading to mastery not only of the basics but of the mindset to handle life that extends beyond the textbooks. Most importantly, we must heed the challenge laid out before us to prepare our students to understand what our disciplines truly involve, how to prepare to practice those disciplines professionally, and how then to be productive in those careers ethically.

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REVIEW OF J.D. SHANK'S INTERACTIVE OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

BY KIM GREWE

The use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in higher education is becoming more widespread as college educators explore ways to increase access to college and make a college education affordable. Besides these obvious benefits, OER also allow for more pedagogical innovation, continual improvement, and rapid development of materials in response to student evaluation. In *Interactive Open Educational Resources*, John Shank provides a go-to guide for college educators who want to learn the basics of curating, using, and evaluating the most widely known OER. With a focus on interactive learning materials (ILMs), this practical guide provides a streamlined approach for integrating ILMs into existing college curricula.

Shank defines effective ILMs as ones which are multi-modal, and require learners to make decisions and provide assessment and feedback along the way.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section, “Setting the Stage,” defines ILMs and sets parameters for how ILMs work into the new paradigm of the digital age of information. According to Shank, the old industrial paradigm relied on static sources of information such as newspapers, journals, textbooks, and videos. The new paradigm relies on more interactive resources for learners, which is why Shank clearly defines ILMs and classifies them into distinct types: online learning modules (tutorials), online games and online simulations. No matter the genre, Shank defines effective ILMs as ones which are multi-modal, and require learners to make decisions and provide assessment and feedback along the way.

The second section, “A Digital Exploration,” focuses on finding ILMs and provides a systematic process for making sense of the sheer volume of loosely organized materials available on the Web. Here Shank provides a search taxonomy for the “what” of ILMs, relying on subject/discipline, keywords, type, technical format, audience, language, and date. Shank also provides a search taxonomy of the “where,” including educational repositories and digital libraries, university and college websites, educational software and entertainment media websites, museum websites, professional organizations websites, and web search engines. Shank provides a ranking system and evaluates these repositories based on five criteria: collection, searchability, usability, currency, and reliability. For inexperienced users, this section is particularly helpful, since Shank provides tips and tricks based on the idiosyncrasies of each repository.

The third section, “Choosing and Using ILMs,” outlines the selection and implementation process – how to choose and evaluate ILMs, implement them into existing curricula, and assess their effectiveness in terms of student learning.

Like a well-designed online course, the book is clearly organized and easy to navigate. Shank provides an overview of the content and organization of the book in the preface, begins each section with a preview, and makes use of tables to provide lists that serve as quick-start guides or illustrate key points. In addition, Shank peppers the chapters with Quick Tips to remind readers of the unique idiosyncrasies of each repository and their search parameters. These Quick Tips, intended to yield more fruitful searches, are invaluable to those just beginning their quest to find and utilize OER and ILMs. Each chapter includes a “Going Further” section with recommended reading, which takes the book beyond the realm of the uninitiated and provides further guidance to more advanced OER/ILM adopters.

Shank also provides a clear explanation of what ILMs are and what they are not. The focus on the elements of interactivity including core content, hypermedia, decision-making activities, learner assessment, and learner feedback and reflection provide a useful distinction between mere open source materials and materials that are unique in the ways that they attempt to engage the learner. His systematic method for evaluating existing repositories and providing a search taxonomy makes this book a must-read for those new to the process of curating and implementing OER/ILM.

Some may argue that such focus on web-based resources may prove to become out of date rather quickly, but Shank has chosen sites that are well established and which continue to grow and evolve in sophistication. The book was published two years ago, but all the sites covered are still in operation and still function in much the same way as they did when the book was published.

Besides the continued relevance of the information, another strength of the book is the way Shank ties his exploration of ILMs into the new science of learning, bringing credibility and a sense of forward thinking to his approach. For example, one of the projects in which he was involved created tutorials using ILMs for introductory calculus classes at Berks College of the Pennsylvania State University. These tutorials relied on Gagne’s nine events as a guide to enhance student learning. Shank uses the creation of these tutorials as a shining example of the transformative nature of ILMs. Furthermore, in Chapter nine, Shank argues that ILMs align with Chickering and Gamson’s seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education, foundational ideas also supported by the new science of learning.

The book follows through on its promise to provide guidance for finding and choosing ILMs. Where it falls short is on the “transform college teaching” promise, making the subtitle of the book, *A Guide to Finding, Choosing, and Using What’s Out There to Transform College Teaching*, misleading. In the preface, Shank asks the reader to “imagine a world where students are excited to use course resources and where they spend more time engaged with their course work” (p. xiii). He also impels the reader to “[i]magine educators being

able to better know what each of their students has mastered and what they still struggle with” (p. xiii). He envisions “instructors being able to assign ILMs that can remediate student learning gaps through automated activities . . . to be completed outside of class anywhere students have access to the Web” (p. xiii). The book does not convince this reader that this ideal world of college education is obtainable through the skillful implementation of ILMs. The final three chapters outline methods for assessing the usefulness of chosen ILM, but they do not follow through on the idea of transforming college teaching. Shank could have provided more than the one case study in Chapter nine (also referenced in Chapter one), showing how one university implemented the use of ILM in a math course. Also, this case study did not provide the type of compelling evidence needed to convince readers that the use of ILMs via Shank’s method actually transforms college teaching.

Questions that readers may be left with include the following: How do administrators cultivate buy-in from more faculty? How do they address the worry over intellectual property rights? What role can students play beyond mere consumers of resources? Even though Shank focuses on the decision-making properties of good ILMs for learners, what about beyond that? In what ways can ILMs be used for remediation or to teach new concepts? Nonetheless, Shank calls his book a primer and it does provide a good starting point for discussing these kinds of questions.

Trained as a librarian himself, Shank seeks to impose order in the Wild West of OER, no small task, given the lack of a consistent method for cataloging and organizing ILMs and the sheer volume of materials out there, both good and not so good. His framework for evaluating various ILM repositories provides a good starting point for faculty members and librarians alike. His desire to catalog and organize seems like a natural inclination for a librarian. In this context, Shank argues that libraries must take the lead in transforming the way in which they serve their communities. As Shank notes, “To remain relevant, we must rethink, re-envision, and ultimately transform how libraries perform the same functions that they have been responsible for in the past (p. xi). Furthermore, Shank questions the role academic and public libraries will play in archiving and storing valuable OER and ILMs. As technology evolves and changes, access to materials could become limited. His argument about the important role of libraries as gatekeepers of information and how they must evolve to fit into the digital age is a compelling one.

While Shank does highlight the important role of librarians, he also calls for collaboration among teams of faculty, librarians, and educational technologists. His suggestion makes a lot of sense. Colleges and universities would do well to heed the call and do a better job of drawing on the unique expertise each member brings to the process. In the epilogue, Shank expresses concern that for-profit publishers and content providers will take the lead on access and adoption of ILMs, driving up their revenues and cost to students in the process. However, educators should take the lead, climb out of their silos, and work with various other stakeholders to reach the common goal of keeping learning relevant and accessible to students. To ensure these materials are available to students at little to no cost; to curate, evaluate, and implement ILMs; and to

make ILMs a viable part of learning in higher education is Shank's vision. His book *Interactive Open Educational Resources* is a must read for those who share this vision and want to roll up their sleeves and get started in their quest to transform college teaching through the use of ILMs.

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INQUIRY: THE JOURNAL OF THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Kim moved with her family to the Chester, VA area in 1990. She attended Virginia Commonwealth University part time for four years in their Art program before taking a break from formal study. After a friend recommended taking an oil painting class at John Tyler Community College in the fall of 2013, Kim felt it was serendipitous. She continues to take art courses at John Tyler.