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# Discourses of Developmental English Education: Reframing Policy Debates

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**DISCOURSES OF DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH EDUCATION:  
REFRAMING POLICY DEBATES**

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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By Aaron Rich Tolbert

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Allan

An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented  
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According to the National Educational Longitudinal Study, an estimated 28% of academically underprepared students who take developmental courses (preparatory, not credit-bearing) graduate within 8.5 years (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006), far below the national average graduation rate of near 60% of students for all postsecondary institutions (USDE, 2016). Given these statistics, some conclude that developmental education itself contributes to the low graduation rate of developmental students (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Indeed, the causes of this attainment gap are the focus of vigorous debates by scholars from numerous disciplines, defining whether the problems exist within the organizational structure and climate of the institution, the developmental coursework, the students' academic preparedness, or with other factors (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Grubb & Babriner, 2013). Similarly, the research methodologies most appropriate to analyze the problems are also debated (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Grubb & Babriner, 2013). In fact, since developmental education's inception, scholars have disputed how to conduct basic skills education (Grubb & Babriner, 2013) and how best to support developmental students (Soliday, 2002). Despite the breadth of current inquiry, few scholars have used poststructural

methodologies to explore the conceptual construction of “problems” related to developmental education, except within the field of basic writing (Horner & Lu, 1999).

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to reposition understandings of developmental English education through the use of poststructural theories of discourse. Specifically, I conducted research to understand how policy discourses produce understandings of developmental English education in U.S. higher-education institutions to better delineate how policies are now shaping the field. Through five rigorous stages of analysis, the investigation of 39 policy documents led to the identification of five major discourses. Four discourses, those of crisis, accountability, standardization, and efficacy, work synergistically to justify the fifth, the role of policy fiat (i.e., commands from state legislatures). These commands both dictate solutions to the field of teachers and regulate the roles of scholars studying developmental education. The discourses shape the collective understanding of problems concerning developmental education and limit the possible solutions.

*Keywords:* developmental education, discourse, English, policy analysis, poststructuralism, and power.

## **DEDICATION**

To Mom, my longest standing teacher, whose wisdom and reassurance has always guided me to build my own unique interpretations of the world.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....	 1
Inception of the Study .....	1
Developmental Education: Definition and Context .....	2
Current “Problems” Identified in the Scholarly Literature .....	8
Specific Policy Trends Impacting Developmental Education.....	16
Research Questions and Methodological Frameworks .....	18
Theoretical Frameworks.....	19
Poststructuralism. ....	19
Discourse, power/knowledge, and truth.....	20
Critical and post-colonial perspectives. ....	23
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	26
Overview of Complexities of Developmental Education.....	26
Heterogeneous developmental English programs.....	26
Student entry characteristics. ....	32
Placement testing. ....	33
Goals and Efficacy Research.....	36



Accountable for what? Defining the goals of developmental education. ....	36
Defining and measuring efficacy. ....	39
Research design challenges.....	43
Regression discontinuity design. ....	46
“Measuring efficacy” differently through discourse analysis.....	49
English Scholars’ Perspectives.....	51
History and access.....	52
Critical inquiry and English’s forms.....	55
Poststructuralist perspectives on pedagogy. ....	59
Faculty roles.....	61
Current Policy Trends in Developmental Education .....	63
Performance-based funding. ....	63
Current state examples.....	66
Summary of Literature Review.....	71
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....	73
Research Questions .....	73
Methodology: Connections to Theoretical Frameworks.....	73
Policy discourse analysis. ....	74
Paradigmatic challenges of policy discourse analysis. ....	77
Methods.....	79
Data selection and sampling criteria. ....	79
<u>Descriptive data about primary policy documents.....</u>	83

Data analysis. ....	85
<u>Phase 1: summative readings.</u> .....	87
<u>Phase 2: coding.</u> .....	87
<u>Phase 3: category mapping.</u> .....	89
<u>Phase 4: themes.</u> .....	96
<u>Phase 5: discourses and subject positions.</u> .....	98
Credibility .....	101
Limitations .....	107
CHAPTER 4: CRISIS .....	111
Students as Encumbrances .....	115
History of Crises.....	120
Maligned Students .....	123
Crisis Discourse Summary .....	127
CHAPTER 5: ACCOUNTIBILITY .....	131
Prosaic Faculty .....	133
Blaming K-12, Assessment, Teachers, and Developmental Programs .....	137
Access.....	142
Harmful Theories of Developmental Education versus	
Theories of Access.....	148
CHAPTER 6: EFFICACY AND STANDARDIZATION .....	158
Overview .....	158
Habituated Faculty .....	163
CHAPTER 7: POLICY FIAT.....	172

CHAPTER 8: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS .....	184
Silences .....	184
Summary of Significance and Contributions to the Field .....	188
Contributions to research and practice.....	189
Re-framing policy. ....	199
REFERENCES .....	208
APPENDICIES .....	230
Appendix A: Policy Document List .....	230
Appendix B: Phase 2 Document Notes .....	236
Appendix C: Coding Category Summaries .....	237
Appendix D: Themes .....	242
Appendix E: Silences .....	243
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR .....	244

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Data Analysis Process .....	86
Figure 2: Within-Case Categorization Map .....	90
Figure 3: Cross-Case Category Map Sample .....	94
Figure 4: Discourse Map.....	99

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### Inception of the Study

Looking back, my research interests have coalesced both from my position as a professor teaching developmental English coursework at a SUNY community college and my matriculation in the University of Maine's Higher Education doctoral program. My particular theoretical perspectives, with my interests in language, poststructuralism, and power, are also informed by my completion of an MA in English Literature through the University of Vermont, where I studied British Romantic poetry and thus the artistic exercise of linguistic power (Lindstrom, 2011). Having an academic background with bachelor's degrees in both the humanities (English) and social sciences (psychology), and having completed graduate coursework in different disciplines, my research interests are consistently inspired by the interplay of interdisciplinary academic discourses.

The inception of this project germinated when I became increasingly drawn to the scholarship on developmental English education from two key areas: efficacy research asking *if* developmental education works (Bailey et al., 2015), and pedagogical scholarship asking *how* developmental education works to produce outcomes (Crews & Aragon, 2004). In reviewing the literature, I discovered no higher education scholars who approached the topic from a poststructuralist perspective to better understand the *dominant framing* of developmental English education. Given the power of discourse to influence policy, (Allan, 2008; Saarinen, 2008) my goal was to explore how policy discourses shape the problems and solutions concerning developmental English education, issues that are widely debated (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Parker, Barrett & Bustillos, 2014).

## **Developmental Education: Definition and Context**

According to the National Educational Longitudinal Study, an estimated 28% of academically underprepared (or differently-prepared) students who take developmental courses (not credit-bearing) graduate within 8.5 years (Attewell et al., 2006), far below the national average graduation rate of near 60% of students for all postsecondary institutions (USDE, 2016). Given these statistics, some conclude that developmental education itself contributes to the low graduation rate of developmental students (Bailey, et al., 2015). Indeed, the causes of this attainment gap are the focus of vigorous debates for both policymakers and scholars from numerous academic disciplines (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Grubb & Babriner, 2013). Similarly, the research methodologies most appropriate to analyze the problems with developmental education or to test its efficacy are also currently debated (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Grubb & Babriner, 2013). To better understand the full scope of these scholarly and policy debates, I first provide context by reviewing a definition and brief history of developmental education. Then, I discuss the choice to use “developmental education” instead of the term “remediation” followed by a brief sketch of the implications of teaching English. This in turn leads to a formal section identifying current problems for developmental education and current policy trends that justify the need for this investigation. Finally, this opening chapter is concluded with a thorough review of the theoretical frameworks on which this investigation relied.

Since its reframing by the 1947 Truman Commission on Higher Education (Hutcheson, 2007), developmental education has been defined as non credit-bearing coursework designed to improve students’ proficiency, in English or mathematics, in

preparation for college-level coursework (Bailey, 2003, January; Borocho et al., 2010; V. K. McMillian, Parke, & Lanning, 1997). Developmental education has a long history in the United States, starting with the foundation of curricular supports for students entering the earliest colonial colleges, like Harvard and King's College (Parker et al., 2014). Because public systems of primary education did not exist in the colonial period, some of these earliest colleges built courses or other supports to help bolster enrollment from relatively small student populations and to "remediate" what were seen as deficiencies in students who lacked the formal training of the elite classes. Developmental education's inception has been traced throughout US history by Parker et al. (2014) from the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, the development of land-grant institutions, the expansions of higher education like the G.I Bill of World War II, and more contemporary changes in 1990s in localized postsecondary systems like the City University of New York (CUNY) system. Across history, developmental education has been a cornerstone in the debate about how different student constituencies access higher education, meaning which demographic groups in the United States deserve the option, have the fiscal means, and have the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) required to attend college. Likewise, developmental education has also been a key part of the debate about the responsibility government has in providing access to higher education (Parker et al., 2014). Through this history, the contemporary context can be better understood.

One impact of the 1947 Truman Commission is that it helped position all developmental education as a central component of community colleges' mission statements (Hutcheson, 2007); this subsequently has shaped current policy debates. Over the last two decades there has been a national shift because of specific state policy

changes; developmental education has gone from being broadly taught at both four-year and two-year postsecondary institutions to being more exclusively taught at two-year postsecondary institutions through mandates of state law (Parker et al., 2014; Soliday, 2002). Scholars have warned that this policy driven shift in developmental education towards two-year institutions unintentionally recreates historic systems of segregated education (Parker et al., 2014). Thus, the policy debates are highly politicized (Parker et al., 2014). In fact, in a study of nearly 250,000 students, 33% of first-year community college students needed to take developmental reading and 59% needed to take developmental math (Bailey et al., 2015). Other scholars have found that 43% of first-time students attending two-year postsecondary institutions took one or more developmental courses (Parsad & Lewis, 2003). Regardless of the exact percentage during a given year, community colleges instruct far greater proportions of the nation's developmental learners than four-year postsecondary institutions (*Almanac of Higher Education 2014*, 2014). Consequently, today, community colleges are often the location of research on developmental education and likewise often a focus for policy debates (Bailey et al., 2015).

Turning to terminology, the label *developmental education* is not consistently utilized by scholars or policy makers to report on developmental English or developmental mathematics education (Boroch et al., 2010; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). Sometimes scholars use “remediation” instead of the term “developmental education,” and sometimes scholars use “basic writing” instead of “developmental English.” I chose to use “developmental education” throughout this investigation instead of the terms “remediation” or “basic writing” in order to follow current scholarly practice (Parker et



al, 2014). This choice reflects situating students' academic abilities not in the pejorative terminology of "remediation," where students have a deficit that needs to be "fixed," but instead in a more neutral discourse of "developmental." "Developmental" reflects that students may either be developing academic skill sets because of deficiencies, or they are developing academic skill sets because they are differently-prepared in comparison to the norms of the academy, bringing unique forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Moving forward, not all scholars consistently report the breakdown of their data between developmental English and developmental math when reporting their findings (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). Consequently, while the long-term objective of this examination was to analyze the discursive landscape shaping realities for developmental *English* education, I reference scholarship that discusses both developmental math and developmental English for the following reasons. First, as stated, not all scholars study nor report on the differences between developmental math and English education. Developmental English cannot always be disaggregated from studies. Second, policy decisions often encompass both disciplines (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010) despite the potential need for distinct policies that account for differences between developmental mathematics and developmental English education (M. L. Collins, 2010). Moreover, the fact that most policy and efficacy research is conducted on both disciplines is one of the identified complications in the literature (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). For clarity in this dissertation, I used *developmental education* when referring to data collected on both English and math, and I added the

terms *English* or *mathematics* when referring to specific discipline-focused research or discussions.

Focusing on content (as compared to terminology), I review scholarship that applies to both developmental English and developmental math education for the practical reason stated above that they are not consistently separated in the scholarship (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). However, again the intent of this inquiry was to focus on how dominant discourses impact the policy landscape for developmental *English*. Therefore, in numerous sections, and specifically in the findings and discussion sections, I focus solely on developmental English because scholars have argued that students' access to postsecondary institutions is empowered or hindered by their knowledge of "standard" English (Fox, 1999). Simply, the argument has been that postsecondary institutions use admissions and placements tests that measure the knowledge a student has of a privileged and historic, White English, English that operates within a larger diaspora of education including the "classic" or canonized novels of English literature, the SAT or ACT tests, and the placement tests used by most post-secondary institutions (Fox, 1999). In this sense, developmental English education has been seen as a barrier to access as it may prejudicially prevent students who speak alternate forms of English from attending the academy (Fox, 1999; Horner & Lu, 1999). The concept of "standard" English falls in contrast to conceptualizing students' language capacities as *differently-prepared*, meaning students who bring alternate dialects of English, be they African America, Hispanic, or any non "standard" form, bring a valuable language skill-set to college.

Complicating access further is the idea that language acquisition is fundamental to identity development and therefore academic outcomes (Horner & Lu, 1999). The links between language acquisition, identity, and access to higher education are more fully developed in the literature review. Here, the key idea is that developmental English education emerges as a credible site of access-focused scholarship, where some see it supporting access (Attewell et al., 2006; Parker et al., 2014), while others see it as a barrier to access because of the disparate gaps between privileged English and other forms of English (Fox, 1999; Horner & Lu, 1999), and still others see it as a barrier due to student pass rates and other outcomes from the courses (Bailey et al., 2015).

Accordingly, this project is situated within developmental education as a whole, but it focuses on developmental English because of how understanding academic forms of English impacts access to higher education. Developmental math is referred to solely in order to illustrate points of contrast. It is intentionally not reviewed in detail either in the literature review nor in the findings, and when I do mention developmental math, it serves only to show the challenge of crafting singular policies to address highly different academic curricula.

Thinking further on the complexities of developmental education, while the common definition of developmental education, given previously, applies to almost all institutional settings, the implementation of developmental education varies greatly between different types of postsecondary institutions (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). For example, the number of courses, the content of those courses, and the alignment of those courses with academic programs varies greatly from institution to institution (Bailey et al., 2015; Bettinger & Long, 2005;

Boroch et al., 2010). In some postsecondary institutions, developmental education is accompanied by other educational elements like mentors or tutoring services, while in other postsecondary institutions, the courses operate without ancillary supports (Boroch et al., 2010).

Turing from institutional structures to research, scholars have offered new ways to measure the efficacy of developmental education that correlate the success of the courses to students' retention rates, graduation rates, and labor market outcomes (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Melguizo et al., 2011). These new goals for developmental education have evolved for complex reasons, to be explored in the literature review, and have left both scholars and leaders in heated debates about the efficacy and value of developmental education (Crews & Aragon, 2004; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Grubb & Cox, 2005; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). Thus, the central problems in conducting any research on developmental education are: (1) the varying terminology used to refer to the courses and programs (Parker et al., 2014); (2) the curricular differences between English and mathematics (Crews & Aragon, 2004); (3) the heterogeneous nature of developmental programs structurally and lack of distinction between them in much of the scholarship (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010; and (4) the debates about what scholarly tools accurately measure the efficacy of developmental education (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012). With this context delineated, a turn to the current problems with developmental education is warranted.

### **Current “Problems” Identified in the Scholarly Literature**

A review of current research revealed manifold challenges facing developmental English education. Some scholars have concluded that students who take developmental

coursework perform worse than their peers in retention, persistence, and graduation rates (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010) and in their labor market outcomes (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Calcagno & Long, 2008; Melguizo, Bos, & Prather, 2011)<sup>1</sup>. Many studies often cite research conducted from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), which determined that only 28% of students who took developmental coursework obtained a college degree within eight and a half years (Attewell et al., 2006). But scholars don't agree upon the accuracy or validity of this attainment gap; Attewell et al. (2006) argued this statistic is not accurate, a point I review later.

In any case, the low rate of developmental student graduates is widely understood as problematic (Bailey et al., 2015). This attainment gap is neither a new phenomenon nor an unstudied one, and the history of developmental education is strongly linked to the open access movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Soliday, 2002). That said, the current completion rate of developmental students is so low that it has garnered the attention of numerous policy focused organizations (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). An example comes from a policy group Complete College America (CCA) (2006), which has claimed that developmental education does not work, in a report titled: "Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere." In the report the CCA praised "governors who get it," listing 30 governors who support the effort to eliminate developmental education in all postsecondary institutions. There is obviously a clear impact on policy if 30 out of 50 governors are endorsing a position of a non-profit, think-tank organization. This impact on policy helps justify the need for the research conducted in this dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> This correlation of poor outcomes to developmental students should not be conflated with causation denoting a broken developmental education system, an issue analyzed in the discussion section.

However, graduation statistics and policy documents, like the one cited here by the CCA (2006), are often generated without a firm definition of developmental *learners* (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). The failure to distinguish the developmental learners, the students, from developmental education, the courses, is a mistake several scholars and advocacy groups have identified in these debates (M. L. Collins, 2010; Goudas & Boylan, 2012). The problem is that this lack of distinction causes a conflation of correlation with causation, a problem reviewed later in the *Goals and Efficacy Research* section of the literature review. This issue of conflating correlation with causation impacts policy debates, making efficacious solutions harder to identify (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). In sum, the major “problem” with developmental education producing low graduation rates is in fact a mistaken conflation of correlation and causation (Attewell et al., 2006). So, defining the current “problem” is itself problematic.

Furthermore, when addressing policy, it is important to remember that developmental education is a crucial point of access for postsecondary students. The issue of access in relation to developmental education has been analyzed by numerous scholars over the past decades (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011; Fox, 1999; Parker et al., 2014), and a few key ideas are worth noting. First, developmental students often reflect historically underserved demographic groups in including: (a) underrepresented racial populations and students from lower socioeconomic status, (b) students who may come from K-12 systems with fewer resources, and (c) students who may lack proficiency with academic forms of English, sometimes because they are immigrants or because they grew up in non-English speaking homes (Fox, 1999). That said, of the students who take developmental education, 24% come from a high socioeconomic status and 38% of

students come from suburban high schools (Attewell et al. 2006). So, it is not just traditionally underrepresented populations that are served by developmental education, and it is therefore inaccurate to view developmental education as a set of courses that only serves as a point of access for underrepresented groups (Attewell et al. 2006). A goal of this study was to contribute to the discussion of access to postsecondary education by focusing on how dominant discourses are dawn upon to frame and shape developmental education policy debates.

Developmental education's effectiveness has been widely questioned by numerous scholars, and as a consequence a variety of solutions, including policy-based solutions, have been developed (Bailey et al., 2015). Numerous specific policies have recently been enacted by local and state legislatures in response to the perceived failures of the developmental education system (Bailey et al., 2015; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). Two recent examples illustrate these policy responses. First, in Florida the state legislature voided, through a complicated set of exemptions, the academic policies that required students to take developmental coursework (Mangan, 2014). Policymakers chose to determine placement in educational curricula through law. In contrast, there was a proposal by the State University of New York (SUNY) system chancellor to eliminate *the need* for developmental education from the system by 2020 (Carden, 2012). In both examples, there is clear evidence that policymakers have directly impacted developmental education through policy changes at the state level. However, drawing from scholars who employ policy discourse analysis as a methodological approach (Allan, 2008; Bensimon, 1995; Lather, 1996), I, too, find that "the framing of policy problems is rarely called into question" (Allan, 2008, p. 1). While scholars have criticized

the poor design of some efficacy research related to developmental education (Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010), how policymakers debate the issues in public (Scott-Clayton, Crosta, & Belfield, 2014), and how these debates impact students in relationship to equity and diversity (Soliday, 2002), in a thorough review of the literature, I was unable to find studies from higher education scholars that analyzed policies related to developmental English education using poststructuralist methodologies to understand how problems with developmental English education were *constructed* through discourses<sup>2</sup>. In other words, in Florida (Mangan, 2014), New York (Carden, 2012, June 4), and across the nation, these kinds of policy decisions are being shaped by scholarly debates and policy discourses that construct how policymakers understand developmental education, yet these discursive landscapes have gone largely unexamined.

Specifically, understanding how researchers operationalize the variable of *efficacy* matters to policy because the definitions of efficacy, and the methodologies used to study it, shape research and practice outcomes (Bailey et al., 2010; Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Several scholars have studied the efficacy of developmental education by asking quantitative research questions about variance, asking *if* students who take developmental coursework perform well, defined through various proximal and distal outcomes (e.g., course completion and graduation rates) (Bailey et al., 2010; Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Of course, quantitative methods (Maxwell, 2013; J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010) are often appropriate tools to answers research questions about causation and variance. However, these research questions of variance are fundamentally different from

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<sup>2</sup> Numerous scholars from composition studies have utilized poststructuralist methods to discuss developmental education, e.g., (Horner & Lu, 1999), but not in the direct application of policy document analysis. Likewise, policy analysis has been widely conducted on developmental education (Parker et al., 2014), but not through poststructuralist lenses.



qualitative questions of process (Maxwell, 2013), questions that ask *how* (not *if*) developmental education changes outcomes for students. Here too scholars have investigated numerous research questions pertaining to developmental education, including how to improve: developmental classrooms (Horner, 2011; Perin, 2013; Reynolds & Rice, 2006; J. S. Taylor, Dimino, Lampi, & Caverly, 2016), academic assessment (O'Neill, 2011; Saxon & Morante, 2014; Schendel & Macauley, 2012; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014; Zayani, 2001), and the structure of postsecondary institutional systems themselves (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Conner & Rabovsky, 2011; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Furthermore, divergent scholarly opinions and commentary on policy's appropriate role in developmental education pervade the research literature (M. L. Collins, 2010; Saxon, Martirosyan, & Vick, 2016; Soliday, 2002). Despite this, most studies do not question the *framing* of policy questions themselves. Asking *if* and *how* developmental education improves outcomes for students is different from asking how policy discourses shape *what* the measured outcomes should be, *who* is measured, and *how* policies are constructing the limits of responses and solutions as well as possible unintended consequences. Therefore, if the discourses shaping realities for developmental education were better understood, the impact of those policies on the efficacy of developmental education and access to postsecondary institutions could be better understood.

Looking at the broader policy landscape, discourse analyses of policy have provided valuable insights on relevant topics that affect developmental education. Scholars of higher education have studied parallel topics through theories of discourse including: the impact of economic discourses on U.S. higher education (Suspitsyna,

2012), the shaping of access to higher education through state sponsored opportunity programs, for example McNair or TRiO programs (Hinsdale, 2012), the construction of access for undocumented students through policies of in-state resident tuition (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012), and the underlying discourses shaping discussions of education “gaps” between minorities and Whites generally throughout the United States (Bertrand, Perez & Roger, 2015). The outcomes of these studies are illuminating. For example, Bertrand et al. (2015) showed that the educational attainment gaps between Whites and minorities (percentage of graduates) are shaped by deficit discourses that “assert[...] that those most negatively impacted by inequality *cause* inequality” (p. 2). Simply, when policymakers employ deficit discourses, they blame students and their racial minority cultures for educational gaps instead of blaming systemic inequities in educational structures and funding. Furthermore, Bertrand et al. showed that deficit discourses function through the interplay of multiple discourses, interdiscursively, to shape how policymakers define the causes of educational gaps.

Equally important, Suspitsyna (2012) showed that policy discourses related to higher education construct subjects through widening discourses of economics, and that those discourses “tend [...] to give more prominence to universities’ participation in the economy than to their role in society” (p. 50). Economic discourses preference the idea that generating wealth should be a higher priority for postsecondary institutions above creating an educated citizenry, producing novel research, or expanding cultural richness (Suspitsyna, 2012). The dominance of this economic discourse is reviewed later both in the literature review section on performance-based funding for state postsecondary institutions and in the discussion of the findings of the investigation. Finally, the

application of discourse analysis has also revealed that access to higher education is deeply impacted through a discourse of *the disadvantaged* where minority students are often seen as objects of pity instead of contributors of knowledge to a greater institutional lexicon (Hinsdale, 2012).

On the whole, these applications of discourse analysis justify the value and promise of studying how discourses shape realities for access to higher education (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Hinsdale, 2012) and for the educational attainment gaps between minorities and Whites, meaning the percentage of degrees earned by underrepresented populations compared to Whites (Bertrand et al., 2015). However, while these past studies apply to issues of access, again, I could not find any scholarship from higher education researchers that specifically applied theories of discourse to developmental education. A fissure in scholarly knowledge exists then in the particular intersection of access, developmental education, and discourse. Consequently, the purpose of this dissertation was to study the broader discourses that contribute to constructing the policies that shape developmental English education. By understanding discourses that policymakers draw upon to shape developmental education, scholars can better understand access to postsecondary institutions. The significance of analyzing policy through poststructural lenses lies in “uncover[ing] policy silences and mak[ing] visible the powerful discourses framing policy initiatives” (Allan, 2003, p. 1). To better understand the importance of discourses in the policy debates, I now return to current policy trends that impact developmental education.

### **Specific Policy Trends Impacting Developmental Education**

In the policy landscape, it is important to note that 35 states have policies that determine which students are placed, and how they are placed, in developmental courses (Wilson, 2012). Additionally, there is a clear goal of numerous state and postsecondary leaders to eliminate developmental education from college systems through policy changes (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Recently, “several states have also eliminated state funding of developmental education from four-year institutions... Nevada, South Carolina, Nebraska, and ... Ohio” (Wilson, 2012, p. 34). This policy trend intersects alternate debates concerned with access, equity, and the quality of education (Bailey et al., 2015; Crews & Aragon, 2004; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Parker et al., 2014). Furthermore, a lack of consensus among scholars about developmental education’s efficacy complicates policy debates (Parker et al., 2014).

For example, policymakers are often presented with the cost of developmental education during relevant policy discussions (Parker et al., 2014). However, scholars have debated amongst themselves over accurate estimates of developmental education’s cost with estimates ranging between 1.13 billion dollars (Pretlow III & Wathington, 2012) and nearly 7 billion dollars a year (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). With a climate of fiscal constraint on state budgets (Heller, 2011), when state policymakers review research summaries in policy briefs that suggest developmental coursework is costly and does not help students succeed, the potential impact on developmental programs can be substantial (Goudas & Boylan, 2012).

Similarly, researchers also document that racial minorities place into developmental education at higher rates than Whites (Bailey et al., 2015; Parker et al.,

2014). Likewise, scholars have found that students' success in developmental courses is stymied by a lack of resources in community colleges as compared to four-year institutions, resources concerning course content, tutoring, and instruction (Callahan & Chumney, 2009). Specifically, Parker, Bustillos, and Behringer (2010) and Soliday (2002) have analyzed the impact of removing developmental education from four-year colleges to two-year colleges and concluded that this historical shift has reproduced systems of segregation and marginalization.

One prominent example of this type of policy was the decision by the City University of New York (CUNY) system to end all developmental education in its four-year postsecondary institutions (Soliday, 2002). The outcome made all students who tested into developmental education begin by attending two-year colleges and then transfer back into four-year CUNY institutions. Because larger proportions of racial minority students have historically tested into developmental coursework, minorities were segregated by this policy into two-year postsecondary institutions, leaving the 4-year CUNY colleges less racially diverse than the two-year colleges, a fact critiqued by multiple scholars through various studies (Parker & Richardson Jr, 2005). Understanding the role of dominant discourses that shape policy debates becomes more urgent considering that five states have recently made the same policy choice as the CUNY system to eliminate funding for developmental education in four-year institutions (Wilson, 2012) despite clear scholarly reservations about the impact of eliminating developmental education on students' access to higher education (Soliday, 2002). Again, while scholars have employed critical paradigms to analyze how eliminating developmental education impacts access (Parker et al., 2010; Soliday, 2002), the

construction of these policy debates through discourse has not been investigated. Simply, learning how discourses shape understandings of developmental education may prove helpful for scholars and policymakers navigating the policy landscape. It is from this backdrop that I formulated the research questions for this study.

### **Research Questions and Methodological Frameworks**

The following research questions guided this study: 1) How are the problems of developmental English education defined in relevant policy documents? 2) How are policy solutions for developmental English education defined in relevant policy documents? 3) What are the central subject positions expressed for developmental students and developmental faculty? 4) How do the discourses of these policy documents establish realities for developmental students in higher education?

To best answer these research questions concerning discourses, qualitative research methodologies are most appropriate (Allan, 2008; van Dijk, 2011). Specifically, I used policy discourse analysis, which “provides a specific method for examining policy discourses and the subject positions produced by them” (Allan, 2009, p. 30). To be clear, the primary example of research methods guiding my work came from Allan’s (2009) research, where she used feminist policy discourse analysis to deconstruct policy problems and suggest solutions to advocate for women’s roles in higher education. As discussed in Chapter 3, I used similar methods but applied a broadly critical paradigmatic lens to language, due to my project’s focus on language acquisition in developmental English education. A review of the inquiry paradigms and methodologies utilized for this investigation follows.

## Theoretical Frameworks

### Poststructuralism.

Postmodern and poststructuralist frames of inquiry are often cited as theoretically complex perspectives that are challenging to define (Allan, 2009; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Peters & Burbules, 2004; van Dijk, 2008). Stemming from the works of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and others (Jardine, 2005; Rivkin & Ryan, 2004), poststructuralist paradigms focus on how the construction of language itself produces aspects of reality (Allan, 2009; Bacchi, 2000; van Dijk, 2009), as compared to the exclusive internal interpretations of individuals as posited by some positivist and constructivist scholars<sup>3</sup>. Ontologically, poststructuralists can be classified as anti-realists where few or no universal truths exist; rather, poststructuralist scholars argue that multiple individual identities, and therefore realities, can coexist simultaneously (Allan, 2009; van Dijk, 2008). The key point is that discourse both reflects and generates realities and perceptions of reality (Allan, 2009); therefore, the discourses drawn upon to frame a given topic are often the foci for a poststructuralist researcher (van Dijk, 2008). Discourses exert power that functions *through* cultural and social systems *by constructing them*, instead of wielding power *over* cultural and social systems (van Dijk, 2008).

Historically important to this project is that fact that scholars often utilize discourse analysis to examine a range of scholarly topics related to higher education (Fairclough, 2003; Peters & Burbules, 2004; Saarinen, 2008; van Dijk, 2011) including

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<sup>3</sup> Positivism as a theoretical framework is understood as “realist”, where reality and truths ontologically are natural and unchangeable, and they can be known epistemically by utilizing the proper objective tools (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivists are identified as “relativists” where realities are in part constructed and rely on the person perceiving them; thus epistemically the realities are created through the person and the research that person conducts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

that policy discourses shape realities for different constituent groups within higher education (Allan, 2009; Allan, Gordon, & Iverson, 2006; Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2010; Suspitsyna, 2012).

Looking at specific applications of poststructural theories to teaching English, scholars have argued for decolonizing practices (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), or praxis (Shahjahan, 2005), that deconstruct the hegemonic power of language acquisition (Ashanti-Young, Barrett, Young-Rivera, & Lovejoy, 2014). Moreover, from some critical and poststructuralist scholars' points of view, the teaching of English is synonymous with colonization of the mind (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) or acculturation (Horner & Lu, 1999). From these vantage points, racial minority populations do not need help learning a colonizing language, nor do they need language mixing practices like code-meshing<sup>4</sup> (Ashanti-Young et al., 2014), which would simply re-inscribe power through language acquisition (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Instead, for these scholars, the teaching of language through specific pedagogies can be akin to the erasure and homogenization of personal and cultural identity (Greenfield, 2011). Here, these views provide contextual layering and are reviewed in greater detail in the literature review provided in Chapter 2.

### **Discourse, power/knowledge, and truth.**

*Discourse* is defined in numerous ways according to different academic disciplines and research methodologies, ways distinct enough to have entire scholarly texts devoted to defining this single term (Mills, 2011). For the purpose of this study, discourse refers to language, both written and spoken, that “[is] symbolic of power relations that construct culture as well as reflect it” (Allan, 2009, p. 13). In this sense,

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<sup>4</sup> Code-meshing occurs when a person uses two languages simultaneously in the same sentence (or spoken phrase) to articulate an idea; e.g., This taco de carne and peppers es deliciosos.



discourse may also be understood through the aesthetic critique of Abrams's (1971) famous metaphor of a mirror and lamp that symbolize the function of art in the British Romantic movement; discourse both produces and reflects culture (Allan, 2009). Stemming also from both deconstruction (Derrida, 1976) and Foucauldian poststructuralist (Foucault, 1978) approaches to language, discourse is seen as modular, constantly transforming and shaping to its given historical (Foucault, 1978) and linguistic (Derrida, 1976) contexts.

[A] discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements that are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence. (Mills, 2011, p. 10)

Parallel in both Allan's (2009) and Mills' (2011) definitions of discourse are some central tenets of how discourse is defined. First, discourses do not only reflect reality, they help shape or create reality through power (Allan, 2009; Fairclough, 2003; Mills, 2011; van Dijk, 2008). This *productive* function of power (Allan, 2009), not its repressive possibilities, is the focus of most discourse studies (Mills, 2011; van Dijk, 2011). Steering clear of binary thinking, multiple discourses around a particular topic exist in a given context at all times, and a particular discourse is considered dominant not only when it silences others but when it eclipses all alternate truths or analyses (Allan, 2008).

Equally important, *power* in poststructuralist approaches does not refer to "a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state" (Foucault, 1978, p. 92). Instead, in poststructuralist approaches, power moves away from Marxist notions of governmental or hierarchical power (Derrida, 1976), like the power to

enforce rules through a police presence, and rather to a broader and more complex definition. Power, for poststructuralism, is *productive* (Allan, 2009; Macleod, 2002), in that power produces “grid[s] of intelligibility of the social order,” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93) or ways of understanding our social contexts and realities. Put simply, power does not operate only from external forces to control individuals, it operates productively by shaping how individuals interpret, react to, and understand the world.

Understanding the *productive* nature of power, as originally defined by Foucault (Jardine, 2005), is an essential idea that undergirds policy discourse analysis (Allan, 2009). Productive power is different than hierarchical power because instead of restricting the actions of individuals through exerting a “power-over” them (Allen, 1999), productive power is exerted (Allan et al., 2006) through a specific form of social agency, the agency to define what is considered knowledge and what knowledge is considered valid or true (Foucault, 2001).

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true. (Foucault, 2001, p. 1668)

Thus, the key to understanding discourse, power, and truth from poststructuralist perspectives is that “truth is an *effect* of power/knowledge operating through discourse” (Allan, 2008, p. 24). Because discourse is the medium through which power operates to define what is knowledge and what are truths, discourse analysis seeks to identify and deconstruct these discourses or regimes of truth (Fairclough, 2003).

From my theoretical perspective, I do not argue categorically that no truths exist outside of discourse. That position lies too far afield in the greater theoretical lexicon than I, as an interdisciplinary scholar, can support. Rather, I simply argue that the *truths* about the efficacy, functionality, and role of developmental education are, in part, constructed as an effect of the power of discourse shaping policy-related documents. Therefore, I argue that understanding the discourses drawn upon to publicly debate this topic holds both practical value in improving developmental education and theoretical value in understanding how discourses impact the policy landscapes of postsecondary education.

### **Critical and post-colonial perspectives.**

In order to look at policies impacting developmental education, it is important to understand the underlying assumptions when teaching language mastery. Decades of critical scholarship has been conducted on the topic of language acquisition and the teaching of English (Ashanti-Young et al., 2014; Greenfield, 2011). Critical paradigms are in essence a collection of various forms of inquiry ranging from Marxism (Kezar et al., 2006; Rivkin & Ryan, 2004), to some feminisms (Allan, 2009; Kezar et al., 2006), post-colonialism (Scott, 2006), and even ecocriticism (Kroeber, 1994). In contrast to poststructuralist perspectives where truth is constructed through discourse, critical paradigms work from an ontological perspective of critical-realism (Guba, 1990) that see particular aspects of reality as objectively true, meaning that matrices of oppression systematically marginalize particular groups of people (Allan, 2009; Scott, 2006). From critical perspectives, this systemic imbalance of power does not simply create marginalization, it also produces systems of privilege, for whites (Rothenberg, 2005), for

men (Johnson, 2006), for the wealthy (Rothenberg, 2010), and for colonizers (Scott, 2006), and those with particular dialects of language (Greenfield, 2001). Critical paradigms often work to write alternate histories for marginalized groups in order to show how systems of privilege and marginalization were generated and how they evolved over time (P. H. Collins, 1999; Rothenberg, 2010; Takaki, 1993). Fundamental then to this study is the idea that the very teaching of English may enact privilege and that the *need* for developmental English education could be in part a “construct,” a truth produced by a dominant discourse effected through policy (Horner & Lu, 1999, p. 191). With this said, I hold two fundamental assumptions about access, along with other critical scholars (Parker et al., 2014), that undergird this research. First, I believe that access to higher education is a public good that forwards the interests of a healthy democracy. Second, I also assume, based on the scholarship of others (Fox, 1999; Parker et al., 2014; Solidary, 2002) that developmental education is a crucial nexus for discussing access to higher education because of its role as introductory coursework. This said, scholars have shown that developmental education is both important to supporting access (Attewell et al., 2006, Parker et al., 2014) as well as a barrier to access (Bailey et al., 2015; Horner & Lu, 1999), research discussed in the literature review.

As a final note, ontologically and epistemologically, critical and poststructuralist perspectives can be viewed as fundamentally incongruous (Allan, 2009; Kezar et al., 2006). While a thorough discussion of utilizing potentially oppositional theoretical frameworks is given focus in the research design section of this manuscript, scholars have previously set precedent of paradigmatic integration by combining aspects of critical and

poststructuralist theories in higher education policy research (Allan, 2009; Bensimon, 1995; Lather, 1996; Saarinen, 2008).

Mapping the structure of this inquiry, the review of the literature begins with a short summary of key research on challenges for developmental English education. Next, I review complex debates about efficacy research in relation to developmental education in general. Additionally, I also review pieces of scholarship from critical and poststructural paradigms of inquiry that focus on the ethics and implications of teaching English in postsecondary institutions in the United States with a specific section covering pedagogical research conducted by writing teachers and scholars themselves. I conclude by tracing a few examples of recent policy changes in specific states to outline the breadth of policy discussions. Finally, I work to summarize essential policy studies in relation to developmental English education. Through this review of the literature, I provide a rationale for asking my specific research questions that frame the design for this study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter I discuss the current landscape of policies, research about efficacy, and theoretical perspectives that inform developmental English education. I begin reviewing current scholarly conversations about the complexities of developmental education including the heterogeneity of programs, the range of student entry characteristic, and placement testing. I then review critiques of research design weaknesses in some of the efficacy research. Next, I explore the teaching of English through critical and poststructuralist theories, noticing how much of the research on efficacy that informs developmental education policy fails to incorporate non-positivist measures of student success or the cultural contributions of students. Finally, I explore related current trends in higher education, including performance-based funding, and some recent changes in state policies. While almost none of these issues are framed in theories of discourse by the scholars who write about them, a thorough understanding of current debates and trends is important for articulating why policy discourse analysis can add to these scholarly conversations.

### **Overview of Complexities of Developmental Education**

#### **Heterogeneous developmental English programs.**

Developmental education, and specifically developmental English education, is highly varied from institution to institution, often with meaningful, stark differences (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). Looking at the structure of curricula is a good place to identify the level of heterogeneity. Developmental English coursework is designed and offered in a variety of formats (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Boroch et al., 2010). For example, some postsecondary institutions have only a single integrated reading and

writing course; developmental English education is just one course with one semester of work before students can take credit-bearing English (Boroch et al., 2010). At other institutions, developmental education consists of three separate levels of developmental literacy (reading) and three separate levels of developmental writing coursework (Bailey et al., 2015). There, developmental education equates for some students to a series of six courses. Similarly, some postsecondary institutions may have developmental English language learner or English as a second language courses, and some do not (Bailey et al., 2015). These differences alone often exist between institutions within a given state (Bailey et al., 2015). Therefore, making comparisons of outcomes data in a given state is highly problematic. If a researcher wants to know how many students pass their developmental sequence, the questions may be, is there a single course or a series of six courses that students must complete to finish their developmental curricula, and are those two “hurdles” comparable? To understand the complexity of developmental education, one can combine this aspect of structural differences in curricula with the heterogeneity of individual faculty pedagogical practices in the classroom (Grubb & Cox, 2005), and the challenges of research become clearer.

One more recent trend in the re-design of developmental education is termed acceleration (Bailey et al., 2015). Developmental English courses are offered as integrated reading and writing courses, reducing the number of prerequisite courses and accelerating the curricula (Boroch et al., 2010). Some scholars have questioned the use of integrated coursework highlighting faculty concerns with acceleration (Saxon et al., 2016; Saxon, Martirosyan, Wentworth, & Boylan, 2015). Other scholars have supported these accelerated developmental programs (Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2014)

because scholars have shown that there is a strong correlation between not graduating and the number of developmental courses a student takes (Moss & Yeaton, 2006; Saxon & Boylan, 2001).<sup>5</sup> Thus, in reviewing basic curricular trends, one finds high levels of scholarly debate (Bailey et al., 2015).

To understand the debates further, a few examples from the literature are illustrative. In one study, scholars reviewed 254,572 students' participation in 57 postsecondary institutions and found that less than 50% of students completed their developmental sequence (Bailey et al., 2010). In fact, only 40% of students in this study who took developmental reading courses passed a credit-bearing course in three years (Bailey et al., 2010). This descriptive statistic leads to a few alternate propositions. Students could be failing to pass credit-bearing work after taking developmental coursework mostly because of poor teaching or poorly designed courses. Or, students could be failing because the students are simply too far behind academically to improve their skills in 15-30 weeks. The student might be failing because of unintentional biases towards a "standard English" that the students has not mastered (Fox, 1999; Horner & Lu, 1999). Still there could be other explanations for this gap (e.g., individual finances or policy barriers within the postsecondary institution). These separate propositions are vehemently debated by scholars and practitioners (Parker et al., 2014).

Furthermore, this heterogeneity of programs is a key barrier in designing research to study the efficacy of developmental education holistically (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010) because it is difficult to compare programs with stark differences and then induce valid

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<sup>5</sup> The issue of conflating correlation with causation is key in relating developmental education and graduation, a problem I work to illustrate and solve with correlating underpreparedness and graduation, not developmental education and graduation, a topic reviewed in detail in the discussion section on accountability discourses.



generalities (M. L. Collins, 2010), especially when considering principles of research design (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Specifically, Grubb and Cox (2005) have argued that four key factors problematize the research conducted to study developmental English education: 1) diverse teaching pedagogies and practices of individual faculty, 2) student preparedness and attitudes towards college, 3) the structure and content of curriculum, and 4) the institutional setting or structures. Finally, there is a long history of supporting student success through non-academic factors that are still structural in nature like tutoring or mandatory orientation sessions (P. R. Fowler & Boylan, 2010). These topics are widely covered in the *Journal of Developmental Education* and *Research in Developmental Education* (Goudas & Boylan, 2012), as well as other scholarly journals.

Further complexities arise with institutional structures. Some developmental programs are organized as their own departments that include English and mathematics (Boroch et al., 2010; Kuh et al., 2007). Other postsecondary institutions separate developmental English coursework into English departments and developmental mathematics coursework into mathematics departments (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Boroch et al., 2010). In addition, some colleges allow students to co-enroll in credit-bearing coursework (Bailey et al., 2010) while other postsecondary institutions allow students to take only a restricted set of courses while in developmental coursework, and still other institutions do not allow developmental students to co-enroll in credit-bearing coursework at all (Boroch et al., 2010). Thus, the comment “developmental education in colleges and universities is relative and arbitrary” (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010, p. 543) aptly describes the structural heterogeneity and complexities.

Equally important to developmental education program design is that the number of courses in a developmental sequence affects and is affected by financial aid (Bettinger, 2004). While developmental coursework completion does not earn students credits toward degree completion, it does often count toward federal and state financial aid programs (Melguizo, Hagedorn, & Cypers, 2008). In consequence, a college or university's funding can be greatly affected in states where funding is tied to full-time enrollment. For example, in New York, full-time enrollment provides greater fiscal resources from the state government than part-time enrollment (Zimpher, 2014). Therefore, in some cases, there are monetary incentives for a college to adjust curricular restrictions, altering policies that require developmental coursework in order to provide more funding for the college's budget (Hoffman, 2005). In contrast, there may be fiscal pressure to stop funding "costly" developmental education programs that seem ineffective (Melguizo et al., 2008). Furthermore, these same financial issues clearly impact the individual students, not just the postsecondary institutions, and it has been shown that access to financial aid can be a key indicator of persistence for developmental learners, even more than high school GPA (Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015). Some students use up all their available financial aid as they switch schools, fail courses, and retake developmental courses, all of which may result in their inability to complete their degree, making developmental education a barrier to access (Bailey et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2010; Bettinger, 2004).

Finally, there are numerous structural, staffing, and fiscal issues pertaining to developmental education that vary between institutions, even in the same collegiate system (Soliday, 2002). For example, it matters if developmental programs are housed in

one academic unit, as the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) advises, or if they operate in their respective academic disciplines, i.e., English departments and Math departments (Boylan & Saxon, 2009). Boylan and Saxon (2009) argue that having a single administrator who oversees all developmental curricula and faculty, and who reports to the chief academic officer of the institution, provides developmental education the structural support it needs to advocate for campus resources and to connect developmental education with other units within postsecondary institutions. Otherwise, they argue that the faculty may not have the prominence they need in the hierarchy of postsecondary structures to properly advance the work of developmental education.

Likewise, the percentage of developmental coursework taught by adjunct faculty and the training and status of adjunct faculty have also been shown to be critical in developmental program outcomes (Rodesiler & McGuire, 2015; Schreyer, 2012); simply if the adjunct faculty are not included in trainings related to pedagogical or curricular shifts in developmental coursework, then the institution may haphazardly apply novel strategies to improve developmental coursework, for example, utilizing the principles of Universal Design (Rodesiler & McGuire, 2015).

Finally, the historic segregation of developmental coursework to community colleges away from four-year universities (Soliday, 2002) and the subsequent underfunding of those programs (Pretlow III & Wathington, 2012), have all been shown to both complicate the research and to undermine outcomes for developmental students (Pretlow III & Wathington, 2012; Soliday, 2002). Scholars have shown that due to a lack of resources, some community colleges are unable to provide the level of training and

expertise to faculty that prominent four-year institutions are able to provide, and subsequently the quality of coursework offered at two-year schools has yielded fewer desired results for developmental students (Parker et al., 2014). Overall, policies impacting developmental education statewide affect highly heterogeneous developmental education systems (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). That same heterogeneity complicates designing credible, generalizable, or transferable research.

### **Student entry characteristics.**

Another area of complexity in the study of developmental education is that academic underpreparedness is challenging to define in a substantive and consistent way (Bailey, 2009, February; Boroch et al., 2010; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). With a variety of state-level standards for English and mathematics in K-12 education (Newkirk & Kent, 2007), even with the advent of the Common Core state standards and subsequent critique of it (Addison, 2015), and with developmental students' abilities ranging from eighth grade to college levels, (Bailey et al., 2010), no single definition of academic underpreparedness exists. This is evidenced by a wide range of cut-off scores used by postsecondary institutions for placement (Bailey et al., 2015; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). In addition, students who are differently-prepared, meaning that they command a dialect of English does not currently privileged in the academy, may also be excluded from standard definitions of academic preparedness (Fox, 1999).

Furthermore, students in all colleges, but especially community colleges, have highly diverse academic backgrounds (Bailey et al., 2010; Boroch et al., 2010). Scholars have shown that about 19% of community college students have their GED, not a high school diploma ("Frequently asked questions: Community College Research Center

website," 2015). In addition, because over 40% of community colleges students are over the age of 25 (Bryant, 2001), even for those with a high school diploma, they often have outdated transcripts that do not reflect current state educational standards (Roman, 2007). In fact, while many scholars argue for the validity and usefulness of the SAT and ACT admissions tests (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009), some community colleges have admissions policies that do not require students to take the SAT or ACT exams before matriculating (Boroch et al., 2010). Lastly, nearly 16% of the attendees at community colleges are reverse transfer students, meaning they first attended a four-year institution and transferred back to a two-year institution after leaving the four-year institution (Bryant, 2001). Summarily, these differences in student preparation incite community colleges (as well as other postsecondary institutions) to utilize diagnostic tools for student placement into curricular programs, the most common diagnostic tools being placement tests.

### **Placement testing.**

Because of the diversity in students' academic preparation (Roman, 2007), 92% of community colleges have resorted to placing students into developmental courses with diagnostic tests that are designed to speed up and simplify the application process (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Placement testing matters to the field of policy research on developmental education because the vast majority of college campuses articulate through policy the requirements that a student must meet for college entrance, whether or not they have to take placement exams, and whether or not the developmental courses are required (Bailey et al., 2015; Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). For the colleges that use placement testing, the most common tests utilized are the COMPASS Placement Test, which is used by 46% of community colleges, and the ACCUPLACER,

which is used by 64% of community colleges (some colleges use both tests; thus, the total superceeds 100% in sum) (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). However, some community colleges use high school transcripts, state exams, and other metrics to help place students as well. In addition, some colleges require writing samples for placement in developmental writing coursework (Grubb & Cox, 2005). However, despite its wide application, placement testing has been found to be highly problematic for two central reasons (Saxon & Morante, 2014; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). First, some scholarship has shown that between 27% and 33% of students in developmental English are misplaced by the COMPASS test (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). More importantly, about one third of students placed in developmental English education are *under-placed*, meaning they could have passed a college composition course with a *B* or better (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). In general, the COMPASS test under-places far more students into developmental English sequences, 29%, than it has over-places into credit-bearing coursework, 5% (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). Second, scholars have found that high school GPA is the single best predictor of success when placing students, far better than the COMPASS or ACCUPLACER tests (Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). This underplacement is seen as harming student access and success because the students don't need developmental education, and therefore it prolongs their path to a degree by not taking credit-bearing coursework (Bailey et al, 2015). Hence, experts on educational assessment argue that diagnostic testing should be used with a holistic approach that includes multiple measures when making decisions about the placement of students (Bailey et al., 2015; Miller, Linn, & Gronlund, 2009; Saxon & Morante, 2014).

Many scholars agree that improving placement for developmental education is critical (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014) because up to 40% of all students in US postsecondary institutions take developmental coursework (Melguizo et al., 2011), and between approximately 58% (Braxton et al., 2004) and a 74% (Crews & Aragon, 2004) of students attending community colleges are placed in developmental coursework. This has led to education policy solutions that are impacted by the complexities of placement testing. For example, three states require that faculty periodically review and update cut-off scores and other placement measures, while most states do not (Fulton, 2012).

No matter the policy requirements, the need to improve developmental course placement testing does not remove the fact that K-12 educational systems also need to do a better job of preparing students for college with robust reading and writing skills so that fewer students place in developmental coursework (Baliey et al., 2015; Newkirk & Kent, 2007). Furthermore, this debate of responsibility for students' academic preparedness is highly political in nature (White, 2005) because of the dominance of a historical "standard" English used on placement tests that has privileged upper-class Whites (Greenfield, 2011; Horner & Trimbur, 2002). The debates are also politicized because of the impact of standardized curricula and assessment in the K-12 system (Ruecker, Chamcharatsi, & Saengngoen, 2015). This topic in relation to access and language privilege is covered in depth later in this literature review in the *English Scholars' Perspectives* section. Here, it is simply important to note that the issues with placement testing are not only issues relative to the accuracy of the tests; instead, it is crucial to also ask, for what version of English are the placement tests actually testing?

In sum, the work to both understand and amend developmental English education becomes a sophisticated task when considering the complexities of structural heterogeneity of developmental programs, student entry characteristics, and placement testing. To better understand these complexities, further discussion is needed surrounding the efficacy scholarship that has informed current policy.

### **Goals and Efficacy Research**

With low outcomes for developmental students seen in their graduation rates and credit course completion rates (Bailey et al., 2015), it becomes more important to separate highly efficacious teaching and institutional practices from those that are less impactful (Bailey et al., 2015). However, a decisive problem with some efficacy scholarship is that it has reviewed developmental coursework as a whole and not partitioned English and mathematics coursework (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Thus, policy recommendations that affect both disciplines may inadequately account for the disparate disciplinary nature of mathematics and English. A large body of academic research shows the epistemic, ontological, and paradigmatic differences between academic disciplines, differences that impact pedagogy and curricular structures (Biglan, 1973; S. K. Gardner, 2013; Guba, 1990). Consequently, the first challenge in reviewing efficacy research on developmental coursework is that the measures of efficacy may not apply equitably to the needs of each academic discipline. This idea remains relevant for each subsequent subtopic of efficacy research.

#### **Accountable for what? Defining the goals of developmental education.**

Before a practice is evaluated for its efficacy, defining that practice's goals is crucial. By way of metaphor, no rational person would measure the efficacy of



acetaminophen by testing if it could cure cancer because curing cancer was never the intended effect of the drug. Yet, determining what developmental education should do is precisely a central problem in the scholarly literature.

Historically, developmental education was thought of as one piece in a series of academic initiatives, not solely coursework that should support students in passing their first credit-bearing course (Arendale, 2010; V. K. McMillian et al., 1997). While many pieces of scholarship from the mid 1990's supported the efficacy of developmental education in general (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 399), more recent work is highly polarized (Bailey et al., 2010; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Merisotis & Phipps, 2010). This polarization is due in part by constraints on college budgets through shrinking state aid (Heller, 2011). With the estimated cost of developmental education between 1.13 billion (Pretlow III & Wathington, 2012) and 7 billion dollars per year for developmental coursework nationwide (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014), developmental education is a large target for policy makers' debates (Bailey et al., 2015; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). Simultaneously, student success has become a more prominent goal for higher education leaders (Kezar et al., 2006; Kuh et al., 2007). The outcome of the combination of a rising focus on student success (Kuh et al., 2007) and the recognition of developmental education's costs (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014) in increasingly constrained fiscal environments (Heller, 2011) is that measures of efficacy for developmental education have shifted. Instead of measuring if students pass introductory credit-bearing coursework (the most proximal outcome), developmental education is now held accountable to graduation and retention rates as well as labor market outcomes (substantially distal outcomes) (Bailey et al., 2010; Goudas & Boylan, 2012).

From this positivist perspective, developmental education becomes an independent variable that is designed to change the dependent variable of graduation and retention rates; accordingly, state policymakers want to see results (Bailey et al., 2015). But, several issues challenge this seemingly straightforward perspective. First, as stated above, developmental education is not designed to affect graduation rates, so measuring its impact on graduation tests it against the wrong goals (remember, acetaminophen does not cure cancer). Second, not all students who attend community colleges desire to earn a diploma. About 77% of students who take developmental coursework at community colleges express wanting to obtain a degree (Boylan & Bonham, 1992). This said, colleges are still accountable to the vast majority of students who do want to earn their degree. Furthermore, even if researchers control for student goals through research design, there remain numerous challenges to designing quality efficacy research, challenges scholars have articulated and debated in current academic papers (Bailey, Jaggars, & Scott-Clayton, 2013; Goudas & Boylan, 2012). As a result, measuring the efficacy of developmental education by the single metric of graduation rates is inherently flawed because developmental program review is not reducible to a single metric of success. Hence, it is crucial to understand how policies are swayed by this erroneous linking of correlation and causation.

In sum, much of the debate surrounding the success of development education can be traced to how one defines the success of the coursework (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Herein lies the opportunity of utilizing policy discourse analysis to learn more about how policies contribute to shaping understandings of developmental education. Put simply, I was not directly interested in the power to judge

if a developmental education program works; rather, I was interested in deconstructing how the very measures of success for developmental education programs are measured, dichotomized, and defined through policy discourses. I wanted to discern how dominant policy discourses define the efficacy of developmental education programs. The goal was not to support or critique the efficacy of developmental education; instead a goal was to understand how policy discourses constructed metrics by which judgments are made about developmental education. Epistemically, it has been noted that “truth is an *effect* of power/knowledge operating through discourse” (Allan, 2008, p. 24). Thus, a central tenet of this dissertation is that the discourses that provide the possibilities to shape and define *success* for developmental programs, those that define the truth about developmental programs’ efficacy, are an effect of the power to define knowledge about efficacy research.

### **Defining and measuring efficacy.**

Scholars define *efficacy* for developmental education in a very wide variety of ways including: reading and writing proficiency levels immediately following the end of developmental coursework (Bettinger & Long, 2005), completion rates of credit-bearing coursework taken directly after the developmental coursework (Bailey et al., 2010), and comparisons of graduation rates of developmental and non-developmental students (Melguizo et al., 2011). Critical to this last definition of efficacy is the misunderstanding of the goals of developmental education. Goudas and Boylan (2012) explained:

One of the most prevalent themes in recent research into developmental education is that developmental programs are not effective because students who take this coursework do not perform better than non-developmental students in subsequent

comparisons, over and above the comparison of gatekeeper course pass rates....

What this means is that recent researchers believe if developmental courses are effective, then students who take these courses should do better than students who never need to take developmental courses, not only in subsequent gatekeeper courses but also in other areas such as persistence or retention (how long students stays in a class or in college), total number of credits, overall GPA, transfer rates, graduation rates, and labor market outcomes (wage after graduation). Therefore, when developmental students do not ultimately perform better than non-developmental students in all or most of these categories, several researchers conclude that developmental courses do not actually help students in an observable way. (p. 2)

To summarize Goudas and Boylan (2012), a critical flaw in research design surrounding developmental education has been a fundamental misplacement of causality and goals. The purpose of developmental education is not to make academically underprepared students outperform non-developmental students in general. The goal is to *level or equalize* the outcomes (V. K. McMillian et al., 1997). Moreover, the dichotomy of “developmental” learners, the supposition that a student *is* or *is not* prepared for college work as an issue of categorical fact, is itself flawed thinking (Bailey et al., 2013). Students take placement tests, and all of them have a continuum of academic ability, yet they are placed into coursework in dichotomous ways, either developmental studies or credit-bearing coursework (Bailey et al., 2013).

One way to think of the general issue is to compare honors programs to developmental education programs. If honors students had similar graduation, retention,

and labor market outcomes as average students, the honors program might realistically be viewed as ineffective because honors programs (programs students often participate in for the majority of their collegiate experience, as compared to brief developmental sequences) may intend to help students outperform the average student both while in college and after college. In comparison, for developmental students, equal graduation rates as outcomes would indicate that developmental students had risen to *average* academic proficiency levels, that differences had been erased, and thus it would be accurate to conclude that the developmental programs were efficacious (Goudas & Boylan, 2012).

However, even this idea is not concrete. Returning for a moment to the underplacement of students, if students in developmental programs score only a point or two below passing a placement test, subsequently take developmental coursework, and then perform worse than students who scored just a point or two higher during placement testing and took credit-bearing coursework, then the developmental coursework may be detrimental (Bailey et al., 2013). In other words, for students who were underplaced (they did not need preparatory work), developmental education may have no benefit and may even hinder student access and success (Bailey et al., 2013). However, the primary goal of developmental education is to erase differences, or to level the success rates of developmental learners with *average* students in entry level credit-bearing coursework (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). One cannot rationally argue that developmental education should help developmental learners make more money after graduation than average students because developmental education programs are not designed for that goal; honors programs may work to attain that kind of outcome. Thus, justifying policy

decisions to fund developmental education based on its impact on wage outcomes of students conflates correlation with causation.

Attewell et al. (2006) illuminated this issue in research design for developmental education when they performed multiple inferential analyses and compared them using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study with a sample size of 6,879 students:

The bivariate analysis indicates that on average, students who took remediation at a two-year college had significantly lower graduation rates than students at the same kind of institution who did not take remedial coursework. However, after we add controls for family back-ground and academic performance in high school, this effect is reduced to nonsignificance, in both logistic and propensity models. We interpret this as meaning that taking one or more remedial courses in a two-year college does not, in itself, lower a student's chances of graduation. Causal factors that do reduce one's chances of graduating include low family SES, poor high school preparation, and being Black, but not college remediation *per se*. (p. 905)

What Attewell et al. (2006) showed is that the statistical tool of bivariate analysis indicates that developmental education does lower graduation rates, yet they show that this statistical tool is incorrectly applied because it does not account for factors *between* students like academic preparedness. When they utilized logistic regression and propensity matched tools, they found that developmental education does not unilaterally, impact graduation rates in a statistically significant way (positively or negatively). However, it is meaningful to keep in mind that these detailed differences in statistical

tools, bivariate models versus logistic regression, would be hard to explain to audiences unfamiliar with statistics.

In a different vein, a key idea that must be remembered while reading efficacy research is to discern between the efficacy of a single program or intervention, a treatment (Goudas & Boylan, 2013), or an overarching study of many efficacy programs (Bailey et al., 2013). While statistical, quasi-experimental analysis may hold a higher social value in the US cultural hierarchy of educational research (M. L. Collins, 2010) (its actual merits aside), I agree with scholars that both qualitative and quantitative forms of efficacy research have an indispensable space in the scholarly literature (Bailey et al., 2013; Goudas & Boylan, 2013).

As a final note, these debates about efficacy research are not occurring solely in isolated academic corners of education departments but rather are written about by leading scholars at Columbia's Community College Research Center (Bailey et al. 2013) and leading scholars who edit the *Journal of Developmental Education* (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Moving forward, in the subsequent section, I will review other complexities in research design for identifying causal links between developmental education and graduation and retention rates.

### **Research design challenges.**

One important efficacy research design challenge is that differences between developmental students (the test group) and non-developmental students (the control group) already exist prior to any research; the developmental students are understood as academically less prepared by definition from the onset (Bettinger & Long, 2005)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Again, this idea of being underprepared has also been challenged with scholars arguing that these students are differently-prepared with non-standard form of English (Horner & Lu, 1999).

Developmental students are not placed into coursework through the process of random assignment (Boroch et al., 2010; Melguizo et al., 2011). In other words, developmental students are not *randomly* selected from a normalized population; instead, they are *selectively* placed into developmental coursework, through standardized placements tests (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011) from a diverse academically skilled pool (Roman, 2007). Thus, according to the principles described by experts in research design (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010), a *true* experiment is not how almost all efficacy studies on developmental education were conducted (Bailey et al., 2013; Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Attewell et al. (2006) showed that these factors can be accounted for with the correct statistical tools, but the research design needed is complex. Many studies have relied on quasi-experimental, correlative designs but not adequately accounted for differences between test and control groups; thus the maxim, “correlation does not equal causation” must come to mind.

The critical problem with efficacy research that correlates graduation rates and the taking of developmental coursework, I assert, is further complicated by other common standards of research design (Coladarci et al., 2008; J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Other extraneous variables (not developmental classes) can reasonably account for differences in graduation rates of all students including: (a) the difficulty of the major students choose, (b) the complexity of other coursework taken in between developmental classes and graduation (Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Melguizo et al., 2011), and (c) other factors past coursework that affect graduation and retention, non-academic factors like socioeconomic status (F. C. Fowler, 2000; Kuh et al., 2007). Assuredly, Student Engagement Theory, developed by Kuh (2007), and the Interactionalist Theory of



Persistence, developed by Tinto (1987), both include multiple factors that impact student graduation and retention that are not coursework related, like the social engagement of students on campuses and the social integration of students into campus culture.

Furthermore, other systemic barriers within the academy, for example structural racism, may also account for gaps in graduation and retention (Greenfield, 2011). It is therefore important to know that in some scholarship:

Our analyses were able to distinguish the effects of a poor high school academic preparation from the effects of taking remedial coursework in college, and we have found that most of the gap in graduation rates has little to do with taking remedial classes in college. *Instead the gap reflects preexisting skill differences carried over from high school* [emphasis added]. (Attewell et al., 2006, p. 915)

Attewell et al. show that the underpreparedness is the causal factor.

With this in mind, I conclude that too many extraneous factors affect retention and graduation rates across the expanse of a student's entire collegiate academic career to lay total causal blame for low graduation rates on any single set of introductory courses, developmental or credit-bearing courses. Instead, I argue in the discussion section, like Attewell et al. (2006), that *academic underpreparedness* follows students their whole academic career; this underpreparedness should be a key focus of developmental scholarship, not developmental coursework alone. I also argue, like others (Greenfield, 2011) that structural systems of privilege also account for these attainment gaps.

Remembering that students have a continuum of academic abilities despite a dichotomy of curricular pathways (DE or not) is fundamental to scholarship (Bailey et al., 2013).

### **Regression discontinuity design.**

Regression discontinuity design (RDD), a specific research design, has been utilized to deal with the challenges of generating random trial experiments to test the efficacy of developmental education and still answer research questions based on the correlation of graduation, persistence, and retention rates of developmental learners (Bailey et al., 2013; Melguizo et al., 2011; Moss & Yeaton, 2006). This design essentially takes students who are from a homogenous group, like students in a tight range of cut-off scores on placement tests, and asks if there are differences between students who take developmental classes and those that take credit-bearing coursework (Bailey et al., 2013). Calcagno and Long (2008) utilized this design to sample 100,000 students in the Florida community college system and found that developmental coursework improved retention of students from the spring to fall but not the completion rates of introductory coursework. Importantly, other scholars have also found strong support for the idea that developmental education improves students' completion of subsequent classes using the same regression discontinuity design (Moss & Yeaton, 2006). However, it has also been argued that most findings of the research conducted with a regression discontinuity design methodology conclude that developmental education has a null or negative impact on students' success in subsequent coursework (Bailey et al., 2013). But for Bailey et al. (2013), as he noted, this only applies to underplaced students; he does not address academically underprepared students because RDD looks at students who score right near the cut-off for credit-bearing coursework on placement tests.<sup>7</sup> Thus, a central tenet of

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<sup>7</sup> Bailey et al.'s (2013) work is sound in that it shows that underplaced students don't benefit from developmental education. He is correct to say that regression discontinuity design (RDD) does study a homogenized experimental group by examining students who score right at the top of cut-off scorers. But one cannot generalize and say then that academically underprepared students (as compared to underplaced

statistical analysis must be remembered: one cannot induce generalities about population X through statistical analyses unless the analysis actually studies population X (Coladarci, Cobb, Minium, & Clarke, 2008). Highly underprepared students are not the population studied by regression discontinuity; instead, regression discontinuity is used to study *underplaced* students:

We should emphasize that this analysis does not compare students with a much lower score (for example, a 20) to college ready students. Students with a score of 20 have a much lower probability of earning a C in gatekeeper course, so we would never argue that they are similar to college-ready students. (Bailey et al., 2013, p. 4)

So, while underplaced and highly underprepared students might both be labeled as developmental learners and placed in developmental coursework, they are not the same population. As a result, scholars who use regression discontinuity design should not generalize their findings to all developmental programs, as Bailey et al. (2013) have warned. In sum, the research question itself, asking about the efficacy of *all programs*, is perhaps too vague when applied to developmental education because of the heterogeneity of developmental programs (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Fundamentally, this is a challenge for policymaking because policies that would affect all developmental programs, for example in a single state, may impact these potentially highly heterogeneous developmental programs with uniform regulations or oversight.

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students) don't benefit from developmental education. No real studies using true random assignment have been done (that I found). Simply, RDD does not fix the problem of random assignment for a homogenized group of *truly academically underprepared* students, all points Dr. Bailey often asserts but that readers ignore or miss.

With the problems of efficacy research that correlate developmental education to distal outcomes (e.g., graduation) clarified, it is important to review research that has tested the efficacy of developmental coursework on its original goals. Bailey et al. (2010) found that “about 30% of students complete the entire sequence to which they are referred” (p. 255). Thus, the overall persistence through to credit-bearing coursework is mixed.<sup>8</sup> Scholars, working with the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), have shown that 71% of students pass their developmental reading coursework, and 68% pass their developmental writing coursework (Attewell et al., 2006). So, the overall persistence of students through developmental English coursework is reasonable, near 70% (Attewell et al., 2006), but the persistence through credit-bearing coursework is low, near 30% (Bailey et al., 2010). This comparison supports the idea that developmental coursework is not itself the sole barrier to completion. What inferentially is most logical is that the developmental coursework could not address the full effect of students’ underpreparedness. When we consider trying to move a student with eighth-grade English skills to college-level skills in 15 or 30 weeks, it becomes less complicated. Logically, that amount of instruction cannot address the full measure of underpreparedness, be it academic, social, motivational, or other forms of underpreparedness. In addition, another reasonable conclusion is that the underpreparedness may describe the institution (Honrer & Lu, 1999) (the faculty, the course itself) instead of the students, meaning that the agency and value of the student experience could not be adequately accounted for by the institution. However, if the

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<sup>8</sup> Other work has shown strong support for the efficacy of developmental mathematics coursework (Bahr, 2008), but in the context of this review, determining the efficacy of developmental English education remains more important.

underpreparedness of the institution is being described, then it would be crucial to note if this occurred only in the developmental courses or in all entry level coursework.

On the whole, arguing that developmental education systems need to improve because of their efficacy in relation to numerous proximal outcomes is logically sound (Bailey et al., 2013; Bailey et al., 2015); however, college leaders and policymakers who are under great pressure to cut ineffective programs face confounding choices because of the ambiguity and contention among research outcomes (Bailey et al., 2015; M. L. Collins, 2010; Moss & Yeaton, 2006). For the most underprepared students, accelerating or eliminating developmental education may undermine the mission of the institution (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). The challenge that many scholars are working towards now is researching what effective steps can be taken.

**“Measuring efficacy” differently through discourse analysis.**

To justify the value of applying poststructural perspectives to understanding developmental education policy, it must first be noted that much of the research on efficacy is framed by positivist paradigms of inquiry. As shown, there are detailed methodological challenges in measuring causality in the efficacy debates. However, I assert that a critical gap in the literature is that the debates are typically shaped predominantly by the logic and bounds of positivist research design methodology, as determined by experts e.g., J. McMillian & Schumacher (2010). Put simply, at the time of this work, no published studies in higher education journals used poststructural perspectives, like policy discourse analysis, to question the *idea* of efficacy in

relationship to developmental education.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the scholarship reviewed here contains research design debates *within* a positivist or constructivist framework, debates that fail to see how the very research questions are being asked. These positivist and constructivist frameworks fail to question the epistemological underpinnings of their research questions. Again, the clear majority of developmental education research on efficacy asks *if* developmental education *works*, inherently seeking for an eternal “truth” instead of asking how “works” is defined by the scholars posing the efficacy questions. Again, my goal was not to analyze the discourses in *scholarly* articles but rather to analyze *policy* discourses framing understandings of developmental English education.

Another important issue that leads to the value of applying theories of discourse concerns the goals of developmental education. Developmental education serves more than the goal of helping students pass credit-bearing coursework. It also simultaneously works as a *point of access* for students from across demographic norms (Attewell et al., 2006) and especially for historically less privileged students (Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2008; Parker et al., 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Community colleges have generally served lower economic status, more racially diverse students, who attended poorly funded and academically less rigorous K-12 schools (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The American Association of Community Colleges estimated that of all the college students in the United States, community colleges serve 61% of Native Americans, 57% of Hispanics, 52% of Blacks, and 43% of Asian/Pacific Islanders (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015). As a result, the national

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<sup>9</sup> To be clear, scholarship has been conducted using poststructural theories on developmental English education by composition and rhetorical specialists, as well as other English scholars, but none (were found) with a social science orientation towards policy analysis.

initiative by some scholars, college leaders, and policymakers to eliminate developmental coursework from four-year postsecondary institutions (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010), can be seen as the destruction of an equity producing system (Calcagno et al., 2008; Jehangir, 2002; Parker et al., 2014), for the benefit of a privileged four-year education system (Soliday, 2002), shifting advantages to privileged groups, affecting power to operate through the very process of knowledge production (Välimaa & Hoffman, 2008). The issues of access to higher education and equity become even more complex as English scholars' perspectives are reviewed.

### **English Scholars' Perspectives**

The majority of literature reviewed thus far has stemmed primarily from higher education scholarship, social science research design, and poststructuralist theorists. However, as evidenced later in the findings of this study, English teachers' and scholars' practical and theoretical contributions to the task of improving teaching English are necessary to understanding the issues more holistically. With this said, even a narrow review of the scholarship of writing professional administrators; academic journals on composition, developmental education and basic writing; writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines studies; English language learners and ESL scholarship; writing tutoring; literacy theory; and the wide array of theoretical scholarship that underpins all these diverse yet connected fields, would arguably be a dissertation's worth of work in and of itself. While it might be tempting to assume that English scholars unanimously agree about the role and importance of developmental education, several scholars critique its flaws both theoretically (Bartholomae, 1986) and pedagogically

(Horner & Lu, 1999). The following is a short review of English scholars' contributions to the study of developmental English.

### **History and access.**

The history of developmental English education is long, varied, and definitively political (Fox, 1999; Soliday, 2002; White, 2005). Numerous scholars (Fox, 1999; Greenfield, 2011; Horner & Lu, 1999) have shown that the very idea of a “standard” English is itself a myth, and that language has shifted immensely over time (Elfenbein, 2009), as easily evidenced by any person’s challenge in reading a work by Shakespeare today. Thus, the language of *academic discourses*, the discourses of postsecondary institutions, comes from a specific, cultural, historical, and economic stratum of privileged members of society (Fox, 1999). When scholars have noted that there is no “standard English” to which students must aspire that exists outside of culture and history, they have then grappled with two critical points. First, “the argument, as old as freshman composition and as young as yesterday, is that anyone can master a neutral language and that this mastery will create ‘equal opportunity’” (Fox, 1999, p. 26). From the traditional model then, students outside of the privileged literary and literacy history of European colonial Whites (Greenfield, 2011), namely Blacks, Latinos, others who have historically be underrepresented, are traditionally seen as needing to simply be *initiated* (Fox, 1999) into the culture of institutions via developmental English education. The idea that developmental English education responds to a student need, perhaps best named a *deficit theory* by Fox (1999), is then a response not to individual language skills alone but also to the cultural inheritance an individual receives from their privileged or underprivileged place in society. Fox (1999) as well as Horner & Lu (1999) argued that



this view of developmental English education, as solving a student's deficits, removes the agency of both the students and the faculty, ultimately diminishing their capacity for learning and teaching by removing students' socio-cultural history.

Although Fox (1999) dismantled the standard-English myth, he gave credence to the idea that faculty must have standards on which to judge student work and therefore generated a list of new writing standards while relaying the following idea:

If we tell ourselves and our students that they will achieve access if they master writing standards, we are obscuring and underestimating the powerful forces of racism, sexism, elitism, [and] heterosexism that continue to operate despite the student's mastery of standards. (Fox, 1993, pp. 42-43)

In other words, Fox's point is that by forcing "underprepared" students to take developmental English, we are enacting upon them a standard that is inherently flawed, forcing us to revisit how we define *standard*. Moreover, he shows that dualistically pairing access against English standards is itself mistaken because even if students could master (imaginary) premier English standards, their access to the institution relies on more factors than mastery of "standard" English, many factors far outside of students' control e.g., their access to transportation or their work conditions.

The second major insight from English scholarship looks not at individual students and cultural privilege but at postsecondary institutions themselves. Soliday (2002), working to synthesize the history of developmental education and simultaneously frame its relevance, argued that "remediation serves immediate institutional needs to solve crises in growth – in enrollment, curriculum, mission, and admissions standards- as much as it does to serve students' needs" (p. 2). Soliday (2002) argued that the first

developmental education courses at Harvard, in the end of the 1800s, were a response to working class students' matriculation. These were courses that focused on fixing the grammar and punctuation of students who performed poorly in their primary English course. She shows that the motivation to build these courses was not just to remediate student writing proficiency but that the courses supported Harvard's need to separate and elevate itself above local, public higher education institutions as well as increase enrollment. Stemming from this idea of standards is a reoccurring myth, repeated for over 100 years, that there is a literacy crisis that plagues educational systems (Soliday, 2002). Indeed, scholars have shown incisively that the ideas of both 1) shrinking college entrance standards and 2) declining student literacy rates have been historically linked to the segregation of higher education institutions with the subsequent repression of racial minority student access (Fox 1999) as well as access for poor whites (Soliday, 2002). Soliday (2002) noted "in the most extreme view, identity politics are awarded the agency to affect retention rates" (p. 9). Simply, Soliday argued that Harvard used "remediation" to appear elitist and raise its social status as well as to separate its students from other members of society.

Indeed, understanding the history of developmental education as a stratification tool of both class and race between institutions, particularly four-year and two-year institutions, has been thoroughly reviewed by scholars. Horner and Lu (1999) traced the legacy of Mina Shaughnessy's developmental program at CUNY in the 1970s and the history of the CUNY system's shift of developmental education to all two-year institutions in the late 1990s. The end of developmental education in CUNY's four-year institutions garnered attention from higher education scholars who found evidence that

“qualifies or even contradicts some of the claims made in support of the policy that ended remediation. African American and Latino students were disproportionately affected in terms of preparation and participation” (Parker & Richardson Jr, 2005, p. 18). In a like manner, Soliday (2002) reviewed both CUNY and a larger spread both of historic time periods and institutions with similar findings in relation to the stratification of educational systems; ending developmental education programs not only produced results that differed from the intended policy, they also caused systematic harm to postsecondary institutions.

In sum, while some scholars have argued that two-year institutions are the appropriate place to conduct developmental education (Ignash, 1997), both for cost and faculty expertise reasons, many other scholars have shown concrete reasons to question this logic by understanding that developmental education’s history within higher education is crucial to understanding questions of access, pedagogy, and the equity of outcomes for students (Fox, 1999; Horner & Lu, 1999; Parker & Richardson Jr, 2005; Soliday, 2002).

### **Critical inquiry and English’s forms.**

Critical theorists, feminists, post-colonial scholars, and critical-race theorists, have argued, like poststructural English scholars, that English is not a singular language, demonstrating that English exists in numerous dialects across the Anglosphere (Greenfield, 2011; Matsuda, 2006). Indeed, the study of philology has in most part disappeared as a key topic of inquiry within English disciplines (Elfenbein, 2009). Again, imaginary *standard English* (Greenfield, 2011) has been indelibly complicated by

scholars that have shown English varies widely both within English speaking countries and between them (Kortmann & Lunkenheimer, 2012).

For example, scholars have shown that ebonics “contrary to popular opinion, is not the uneducated slang of young black rappers, but a sophisticated and rule-based language group with origins in the transatlantic slave trade” (Greenfield, 2011, p. 36). In fact, examples of scholarship have been written and published using ebonics to show and reinforce its legitimacy, “Should writers use They own English” being a particularly powerful example (Young, 2010). What these scholars share paradigmatically is that language is foundational to identity (Ashanti-Young et al., 2014; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011), meaning the language a person speaks creates part of their psychological landscape in such fundamental ways that to remove or obscure that language is to obscure or marginalize the self (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzmán, 2012).

In the context of higher education, the number of students from historically underserved groups has been rising for decades (Cheng, 1990), meaning the forms of English utilized in postsecondary institutions are multiplying too. Racial minority and immigrant participation in higher education has risen over the last decade (*Almanac of Higher Education*, 2014). Consequently, this issue of multiple forms of English cannot be ignored by post-secondary institutions (Horner & Trimbur, 2002) because, as scholars have stated (Jehangir, 2002), it is imperative to ask for whom higher education is intended?

The challenge for developmental English education from critical perspectives then is that it is possible to argue that the standardized tests, ACCUPLACER and COMPASS, are fundamentally testing for a “White” or privileged English (Greenfield & Rowan,

2011; Young, 2010). Critical scholars argue that diagnostic tests, based on this “White” English, systematically marginalize all students who do not grow up with this “standard English” (Greenfield & Rowan, 2011). An example given by Ashanti-Young et al. (2014) illustrates that quality writing cannot be solely judged by the criteria of using “correct” English:

Within prescriptive language ideology, prejudice against speakers of undervalued varieties often comes with arguments that only the standard variety is able to express nuanced meanings, encode good thought, or produce good writing. Yet again, none of these beliefs has a valid basis in linguistic facts. All varieties of all languages are capable of expressing nuanced or subtle distinctions in meaning. Consider the case of invariant *be*. The Standard English sentence *She is working* could mean that she is working at this very moment or that she has a job and works regularly. This ambiguity does not occur in African American English, where these two meanings are expressed through different grammatical forms, *She working* (right now) and *She be working* (on a regular basis). Here the meanings that are encoded in the grammar of African American English are certainly more nuanced than those found in Standard English. (Ashanti-Young et al., 2014, p. 21)

Of course, “she has employment” may make the difference clear, but the point is not that an alternate sentence exists to denote the same thing. The point is that for many people their particular linguistic market (Bourdieu, 2003) functions for them, despite the academic market’s lack of social recognition or power.

From this point of view, some scholars that utilize critical theoretical inquiry paradigms see both the testing and admissions’ processes (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) as

well as developmental English education, as harming students, not by delaying or preventing their graduation, but by asking them to reform their identities, and learn a new language of a privileged class of people. Critical scholars have placed developmental education, in the case of language, as part of the “Whiteness” of many postsecondary institutions’ cultures (Gusa, 2010) and seen developmental education as part of a system of marginalization that pervades US public educational institutions (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, & Solorzano, 2014).

On the whole, critical frames of inquiry illuminate vital perspectives on the role of developmental English education in postsecondary institutions. Understanding the role that systemic privilege plays (Johnson, 2006) through language (Ashanti-Young et al., 2014; Greenfield, 2011) in postsecondary institutions, and decisively at the point of access (Green, 2001), indicates that developmental English education, in its current form, may be detrimental to some students from underrepresented populations. In contrast, the initiative to reduce the amount and role of developmental education in US postsecondary institutions (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010) may have detrimental effects on underrepresented students and their access to higher education, widening inequities between them and more privileged groups (Parker, 2007). In sum, developmental *English* education, then, is both a path to college and all its benefits, both fiscal and other, but it is also potentially a threat to students’ identities through language assimilation and a possible reconstruction of systems of privilege (Parker et al., 2014).

Connecting to the thread of standards and access, most illuminated by Fox (1999), Ruecker et al. (2015) have shown that the repeated taking of high-stakes standardized assessments in English during the K-12 curriculum, especially for English language

learners, can be particularly psychologically harmful both because of the dearth of culturally relevant materials in the exams and because students who score poorly often repetitively write-off their own chances of success due to cultural and language barriers. These effects generate an adverse relationship between a student and test-taking that may impact taking placement tests in order to access college (Ruecker et al., 2015). Thus, while higher education scholars have recently found that placement tests underplace 30% of student into developmental English in college (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014), writing scholars, working from critical paradigmatic perspectives, have recently called for a reviewed focus on the ethics (Slomp, 2016) and use (Addison, 2015; Ruecker et al., 2015) of writing assessments, and for “decolonizing [the] validity” of writing assessments themselves (Cushman, 2016).

### **Poststructuralist perspectives on pedagogy.**

To attempt to reconcile the political and intellectual issues raised by teaching a dominant language to underprivileged groups of students, numerous faculty have worked to develop theoretical perspectives and specific pedagogies designed to intermediate these negative effects (Greenfield, 2011; Horner & Lu, 1999). A few detailed examples can show how poststructuralist perspectives have advanced the field towards these aims.

In *Representing the “Other,”* Horner and Lu (1999) argue against the essentialist view of language, a view where a specific utterance, either in text, speech, or an alternate form, has a *true* or singular meaning that can be denoted. These composition scholars have been supported by the intellectual frameworks of Bourdieu (2003), who sees language as “the product of the relation between a ‘linguistic market and a ‘linguist habitus’” (back cover). For Bourdieu (2003), speakers use habits of language that carry

cultural capital in specific linguistic scenarios or marketplaces. Horner (2011) further developed the temporal and social aspects of language use in his “Traffic Model of Linguistic Heterogeneity” (p. 14). From this perspective, each language utterance is “informed by who happens to be passing through [a] location at any given time” (p. 14), and informed by a person whose identity is both multi-layered and ever changing. Finally, each language utterance is temporal, meaning a repetition of the same utterance does not equate to the same outcomes “the people producing the traffic, are not the same, ... just as the river into which one steps is not the same, nor is oneself, nor one’s steps” (Horner, 2011, p. 15).

Students entering university systems begin this traffic model on new roads. “Through one’s gender; family; work, religious, educational, or recreational life, each individual gains access to a range of competing discourses which offer competing views of oneself, the world, and one’s relation with the world” (Horner & Lu, 1999, p. 105). Similar to critical scholars who are worried about the assimilation of diverse individuals’ cultures through elitist, standard discourses (Green, 2001), Horner has reiterated Bartholome’s idea, warning that when English education is modeled to remediate students deficiencies up to standards “in the name of sympathy and empowerment, we have once again produced the ‘other’ who is the incomplete version of ourselves, confirming existing patterns of power and authority, reproducing the hierarches we had meant to question and overthrow (“Tidy House”)” (Horner & Lu, 1999, p. 117).

To oppose the position of students as culturally inferior, deficient, or cognitively underdeveloped, Horner and Lu (1999) reimagined student agency, suggesting that faculty employ a pedagogy of *negotiation* with students in a borderland instead of a



colonized frontier, a classroom that teaches towards multiculturalism. This pedagogical model introduces three new types of student “errors,” those of social achievement, linguistic confusion, and cultural difference. Teaching then relies heavily on student conferencing so that faculty can ascertain students’ intended meanings and negotiate changes towards modifying student work. The details of this pedagogy aside, for the current project, the point remains that poststructuralist perspectives have been used by English scholars to design specific pedagogies that improve outcomes for students in basic writing classrooms and developmental education.

In sum, Horner and Lu (1999) showed that English education itself is a construct, a set of programs and courses that produce subject-positions for students and faculty that have the potential, if built poorly, to create unethical and threatening outcomes for all. Moving away from a binary stance *for or against* developmental education, these scholars attend to *how* teaching basic writing can be improved with poststructuralist perspectives.

### **Faculty roles.**

The scholarship and research conducted for and about faculty pedagogy and practice is critical to understanding the larger context for developmental education (Saxon et al., 2015). That said, because this study focused on policy discourses that shape developmental English education, I summate here only a very broad and holistic review of faculty working conditions and roles to give better context for thinking about policy.

The National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) has conducted research over decades documenting the working conditions of developmental faculty (Saxon et al., 2015). A critical element found, tied to the stratification of higher education

across the last three decades (Soliday 2002), is that nearly 65% of all developmental faculty are adjunct faculty (Schults, 2001). Considering that these faculty are less likely to receive professional development and access to professional development funding (Saxon et al., 2015), and because fiscal records show that these faculty, on average, earn less money than full-time professors teaching the same courses at the same institutions (*Almanac of Higher Education 2014*, 2014), it becomes clearer that one challenge facing developmental education is the status and role of developmental faculty. Assuredly, many scholars have argued for the improvement of adjunct faculty working conditions, with close emphasis on both developmental English and composition coursework's role in access for students (Schreyer, 2012). NADE has made clear that improving adjunct training is one of the most effective ways to support developmental education (Boylan & Saxon, 2009). In this sense, Soliday's (2002) thesis, that the stratification of higher education is for the benefit of institutions themselves, is warranted when considering that adjunct faculty seldom have access to tenure, professional development, or even voting rights representation for curriculum creation or in academic senates (Gappa, 2000).

Turning to developmental program design, scholars have looked at numerous issues including: the role of technology in the developmental classroom (Jonaitis, 2012), auxiliary supports like writing centers (Babcock & Thonus, 2012), requiring faculty to advise and integrating advising into class time as a form of student support (Williamson, Goosen, & Gonzalez Jr, 2014), the effect on outcomes when students utilize learning assistance and tutoring (Wurtz, 2015), how to integrate principles of universal design in the classroom (Rodesiler & McGuire, 2015), and how to effectively select pedagogies (J. S. Taylor et al., 2016) even in the context of accelerated curricula (Saxon et al., 2016). In

brief, there is a wide body of scholarly inquiry into *how* faculty can shape their developmental programs and curricula to better meet student needs. Finally, as shown later in the discussion chapters, the absence of English scholars' perspectives in policy debates narrows policy response options.

With the review of the literature surrounding general trends, efficacy research, English scholar's perspectives, critical scholarship, and faculty roles discussed, current trends in policy must now be reviewed to understand the significance of this inquiry.

### **Current Policy Trends in Developmental Education**

#### **Performance-based funding.**

To begin, the focus by the U.S. Department of Education on college affordability and accountability has increased pressure on all postsecondary institutions to improve student outcomes (Blumenstky, Stratford, & Supiano, 2012). A recent trend stemming from accountability policy debates is that most states have moved towards performance-based funding (PBF) models as a form of oversight (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). However, scholars have measured the efficacy of PBF initiatives between 2000 and 2006 and found that higher accountability standards had no effect on student performance (Volkwein & Tandberg, 2008). Furthermore, the scholarly focus solely on the effects of PBF on students has neglected the impact of PBF on postsecondary institutions, avoiding how changes in funding impact faculty, facilities, or other aspects of the colleges (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011). Despite a lack of rigorous scholarship to support the efficacy of PBF (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011), a recent report shows that 35 states now have implemented some type of performance-based funding (Snyder, 2015). Snyder's (2015) report cites which states use PBF, and it was funded by

the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Will, 2015), a foundation that has funded many projects to push PBF further into state policies, often at the protest of many developmental educators (Mangan, 2015). Other constituents are also involved. For example, PBF has been supported by research conducted and summated in several publications from prominent American Educational Research Association (AERA) scholars (Will, 2015, February 12).

The impact of this shift towards performance-based funding has been to shine a public spotlight on postsecondary institutions that appear to be the least effective<sup>10</sup>, meaning community colleges and their developmental programs (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Thus, when scholars have shown that the financial cost of long developmental course sequences is great (Melguizo et al., 2008), it is easy to apply the logic of PBF to regulate developmental education. Consequently, for those states that are now operating under PBF models (Fain, 2013), efficacy research that ties developmental coursework to graduation rates becomes even more urgent. In these states, if funding is tied to graduation rates, then colleges that cannot reach key performance indicators may lose some of their funding. This affects community colleges especially because they serve greater proportions of developmental students (Bailey et al., 2015; Crews & Aragon, 2004), or as noted, in the case of some states because of policy, all developmental students (Wilson, 2012). Some community colleges have responded by making their own metrics of success (Lipka, 2013, April 23). Yet, developmental education is assuredly still being shaped by performance-based funding policies. Finally, the efficacy of developmental education returns here in crucial ways. If performance-based funding

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<sup>10</sup> Because graduation rates are only a single metric of effectiveness, the debate lies in how efficacy for performance-based funding should be defined.

metrics are tied to developmental students' graduation rates, then policy is directly using a measure of efficacy of developmental education to merit funding. Considering the aforementioned challenges with efficacy research that evaluates developmental education, the need for this investigation is further justified.

One way to identify the fiscal pressure in the academic literature and policy is to see that some scholars who study developmental education now include cost/benefit analysis in their research design (Bailey et al., 2015), data tracking, and even titles of their published works such as “A Comprehensive Cost/Benefit Model: Developmental Student Success Impact” (Gallard, Albritton, & Morgan, 2010). The clout of fiscal pressure on developmental education is made salient when scholars chose to advocate for the efficacy of a given tutoring intervention by highlighting “the program investments resulted in increases in developmental education course completion rates of 15.5%, *with a return on investment to the college of 272%* [emphasis added] (Gallard et al., 2010, p. 16). Indeed, I can think of few other forms of higher education scholarship so beholden to fiscal policy that scholars choose to report results this way.

Another way to measure the importance and growing focus on developmental education in policy is to recognize the growing number of prestigious research centers and private, third party think-tank organizations that have funded research on developmental education. Scholars at the Community College Research Center (CCRC) have focused years of scholarship on these topics (Bailey et al., 2015). Similarly, private firms like the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), the Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation have all funded substantial research

projects on developmental education (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). One outcome of some of this work has been policy recommendations to align K-12 coursework with entry college coursework (Addison, 2015; Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2010). This overall trend, in turn, has caused some postsecondary faculty to question their rights to academic freedom and curriculum design in the highly divergent areas of K-12 and postsecondary education (Addison, 2015; Pullin, 2004). Simply, the development of curricula at postsecondary levels has historically been the purview of the faculty, not the state. What scholars have insinuated is that alignment, depending on its interpretation, may come in the form of dictated curricula (Addison, 2015). In contrast, sometimes the third-party organizations claim that they are providing highly needed innovation and insight to the critical topic of educational attainment.

In brief, the fiscal, political, and national clout of these organizations is well known within the greater higher education community (Goudas & Boylan, 2012), and thus, as discussed in detail in the methods section, the policy documents these organizations produce are considered one type of data for discourse analysis. Because of this current policy-focused work from third-party institutions on developmental education (Goudas & Boylan, 2012), scholarship designed to understand the current discursive landscape is opportune.

### **Current state examples.**

Numerous states have undertaken significant policy initiatives to shape and change developmental education in the last decade (Parker et al., 2014). In this section, I examine Florida, New York, South Carolina, and Kentucky, as well as current policy

scholarship, to trace the distinct range of policy initiatives across the country and subsequently justify the need for understanding the discourses shaping the policy debates.

In the case of Florida, the accumulation of evidence against developmental education led to the state legislators passing a law in 2014 that voided almost all developmental education placement policies, at all state institutions, through the granting of exemptions (Mangan, 2014). This means that, currently, most students in Florida who test into developmental coursework can simply choose to skip the developmental classes and enter credit-bearing coursework at will. Consequently, the persistence and retention rates of developmental learners in Florida are of key concern to scholars, educators, and policy makers interested in seeing what effect this state law has had on Florida students (Mangan, 2014). Initial results show enrollments in developmental coursework declined by between 11% and 21% and subsequently that the general pass rates of gatekeeper courses (initial credit-bearing courses) also dropped by 1.5% to 3.2% (Hu et al., 2016). In addition, those students who took non-accelerated versions of developmental coursework had a higher probability of passing their gatekeeper credit course than student in accelerated coursework (Hu et al., 2016).<sup>11</sup> Thus, initial analysis are mixed, but they do not show positive results for access or for the specific practice of acceleration (Hu et al., 2016).

New York state policy serves as another current example. It was clear from actions taken by Chancellor Zimpher, of the SUNY System, that she wants to reduce both the need for and use of developmental education (Carden, 2012). Specifically, she built a task force to consider the 70 million dollars of state funding for developmental

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<sup>11</sup> Positive findings did occur in the erasure of equity gaps between Blacks and Whites in initial college-level math courses (Hu et al., 2016).

coursework to discern how the money was spent and what effect it was having on students (Carden, 2012). Despite this semi-scientific outlook that intended to measure the impact of developmental education, the stated goal of the taskforce was to end the need for developmental coursework in the state within a decade. This method of research does not follow academic standards as it does not start from inquiry, it starts from a mandate to effectuate an *a priori* outcome. Furthermore, it has been shown in state policy by Parker et al. (2014), that “eliminating developmental education...has not eliminated the need for course-based academic support” (p. 63). Also, critical in New York was that the City University of New York (CUNY) system voted to eliminate all developmental education in its 11 four-year institutions (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010), which has left the SUNY system, two-year colleges, and private postsecondary institutions to provide these classes in the city of New York, a topic that underwent rigorous academic discussion and debate (Parker & Richardson Jr, 2005; Soliday, 2002).

Turning to other states, Parker et al. (2014) recently conducted a multi-year study of policy and developmental education in five states: South Carolina, Oklahoma, Colorado, North Carolina, and Kentucky. Through qualitative analysis of over 100 interviews, the researchers found that the policy landscapes for individual states varied widely. For example, in South Carolina, four-year postsecondary institutions are restricted from offering developmental education as a matter of policy. Parker et al. (2014) noted, “It became clear from our case study that leaders in South Carolina did not view developmental education as a strategy that can be used in state efforts to improve academic success and thereby expand economic development” (p. 62). There leaders were convinced that developmental education was a waste of taxpayer dollars, a place



where taxpayers paid twice to educate lazy or unable citizens. In contrast, the researchers found the opposite in Kentucky, where a “positive view” (p. 151) of developmental education held by state leaders helped them create meaningful policy incentives “for postsecondary and secondary educators to stop blaming one another and begin to work together to create solutions” (p. 151). Parker et al. (2014) worked to understand how institutions responded to state policy and showed that no matter the prevailing attitude of leaders in the state, postsecondary institutions still had to find ways to support underprepared and differently-prepared students.

While the efforts in all of the states discussed thus far have assuredly been well intended, the impact has not been simple to discern. Some scholars have critiqued the use of state policy as a mechanism for improving developmental education while ignoring the complexity of the scholarly debates (M. L. Collins, 2010). Putting aside for a moment the question of when to employ policy, substantial issues remain. The idea of “catching-up” students who have years of measurable academic deficiencies is itself highly problematic (Grubb & Cox, 2005). Shortening the timeframe to remediate students or eliminating remediation altogether makes the challenge of teaching these students even greater (Grubb & Cox, 2005). Yet, greater still is the impact that these complexities could have on already under-served populations (Bailey, 2009; Parker & Richardson Jr, 2005). Data showed that “44% of low income students...attend community colleges compared with only 15% of high income students” (“Community college research center website,” 2015). Furthermore, other scholars have reported that 50% of all Hispanic students begin college at community colleges (*Policy Alert: Affordability and transfer: Critical to increasing baccalaureate degree completion*, 2011).

Moreover, numerous researchers have demonstrated that persistence and retention of racial minority students in developmental education falls below that of White students (Bailey et al., 2010; V. K. McMillian et al., 1997). Specifically, Bailey et al. (2010) found that “men, Black students, and those attending part-time or in a vocational area had lower odds of progressing through their developmental sequences” (p. 264). Essential as well is the idea that the factors that affect racially diverse students’ persistence in college are not equivalent to factors for middle-class students (Barbatis, 2010). Suffice it to say, many scholars see minorities as generally marginalized by the American educational system (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Harris & Bensimon, 2007; Kahlenberg, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In this light, removing developmental coursework from the state would seem to counter the New York Office of Higher Education’s stated primary goal “to ensure a high quality postsecondary education is available *to all* [emphasis added]” (New York State Education Department, 2014).

In brief, the larger national push towards accountability and performance-based funding has created a system of pressure on developmental educators, researchers, and college leaders to limit and eliminate developmental education (Bailey et al., 2015). Nevertheless, how this trend affects access to higher education is under debate. The examples in this section illustrate the debates and the underlying principles of them. Questions of equity in relationship to language education and access to higher education are important parts of these discussions that are easily overlooked. Finally, Parker et al. (2014) succinctly summated what is at stake in these policy debates:

While some state leaders may argue that financial stability and economic imperatives require higher education to eliminate developmental education in some

contexts..., we see a moral imperative for students who are so-called developmental or underprepared to not only have access to four-year institutions (if they choose), but also maintain the full commitment of their institutions to support their success. (p. 164)

### **Summary of Literature Review**

This literature review demonstrated scholars' arguments that teaching English is a political act with important historic roots (Horner & Lu, 1999), that the politics of developmental education are tied intrinsically to the needs of institutions, not just students, (Soliday, 2002), and that those very politics affect and are affected by larger national policy debates (White, 2005). I also showed the contention between views of developmental English education as a gateway for access (Parker et al., 2014) as well as a barrier to access based on prejudice against differently-prepared students (Horner & Lu, 1999). Simultaneously, answering questions of efficacy in developmental education are rife with complex debates on research design (Bailey et al., 2013; Goudas & Boylan, 2012, 2013); debates that are being brought to legislative bodies (M. L. Collins, 2010). While numerous studies exist working to understand the efficacy of individual interventions (Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan, & Davis, 2007) or provide pedagogies that respect the agency of students (Horner & Lu, 1999), the greater postsecondary institutional diaspora still faces the challenging task of improving outcomes for students who enter college in developmental education (Bailey et al., 2015).

Because developmental education plays a pivotal but contended role in access, the policy questions that shape, fund, and produce possibilities for developmental education are not simply questions of efficacy and financial costs versus benefits; they are also

ethically linked to questions of equity (Parker et al., 2014; Soliday, 2002). Furthermore, because state policymakers have taken a keen interest in making reforms towards improving outcomes for these underprepared or differently-prepared students (M. L. Collins, 2010; Parker et al., 2014), understanding the policy landscape is critical. Through policy discourse analysis, this dissertation works to map that discursive landscape.

In the next chapter, I review the methodological and theoretical frameworks of the study, my sample of data, and my chosen method of analysis. A detailed discussion of the methods, including analytic examples and numerous appendix items, relates the process I utilized for policy discourse analysis. I then discuss the credibility and limitations of the study. In subsequent chapters, the results are then interwoven with detailed discussions of the discourses shaping developmental English education and the subject positions for students, faculty, and policymakers in subsequent chapters. Further implications for the field are also considered. In the conclusion, I discuss the silences in the discursive landscape, and end with a final emphasis on the significance of the findings and contributions to scholarly conversations.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Questions

The following research questions framed this investigation: 1) How are the problems of developmental English education defined in relevant policy documents? 2) How are policy solutions for developmental English education defined in relevant policy documents? 3) What are the central subject positions expressed for developmental students and developmental faculty? 4) How do the discourses of these policy documents contribute to shaping realities for developmental students in higher education?

### Methodology: Connections to Theoretical Frameworks

The assumptions that undergird this research come from poststructuralist perspectives informing discourse theory, which asserts that discourses contribute to shaping how complex phenomena are perceived in the field of educational policy (Allan, 2009; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2011). Stated concisely, “Discourses exercise power in a society because they institutionalize and regulate ways of talking, thinking, and acting” (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 35). Applied in this context, it is assumed that discourses of research and policy are generating and delimiting realities that shape developmental English education.<sup>12</sup> Put another way, “Discourses may under certain circumstances be operationalized, ‘put into practice,’ a dialectical process [which is] enacted as new ways of (inter)acting...inculcated as new ways of being (identities)... and materialized, e.g., as new ways of organizing space” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 180). Consequently, discourses can

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<sup>12</sup> While this study uses *policy documents* to analyze discourse, assuredly the discourses operating within *scholarship* also impact the overall discourses surrounding developmental education. Because part of the investigation showed that the scholarship used in policy documents was crucial to silences in the discourses, I note the role of discourses operating in research and suggest in the conclusion that the study of scholarly discourses may be a fruitful topic of inquiry.

be employed to create subject positions or identities for particular groups or agents (Allan, 2008). Here, a key idea of discourse studies is that the meanings of a policy document are not simply understood by the author of the policy document but are constructed by the reader's interpretations (Bacchi, 2000), an idea about authorship stemming from the deconstructive literary scholarship of Roland Barthes (2001), Bakhtin (2010), Bourdieu (2003), and others.

Drawing from these theories of discourse, this inquiry utilized qualitative methodologies (Maxwell, 2013) and an evidence-based research design (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010) that employs policy discourse analysis (Allan, 2008). Policy discourse analysis is one strand of discourse studies, a field which has myriad variations practiced by scholars (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2009b).

While a thorough discussion and definition of discourse were delineated in chapter one, a review justifying the essential links between the theoretical frameworks and methodological approach to this dissertation is warranted here. Through a discussion of ideology, power, and policy discourse analysis, the connections between these central components of the research design are examined next.

### **Policy discourse analysis.**

Policy discourse analysis, as both a method and a set of theoretical frameworks, is based on the idea "that policy-making and analysis are discursive practices that both reflect and produce culture" (Allan, 2009, p. 30). The notions of social context and productive power are central components of this method.

"Policy discourse analysis emphasize[s] the importance of situating policy in a social context, in other words, not treating policy, text, or discourse, as isolated or

detached from its historical moment” (Allan, 2008, p. 51). This conceptualization of discourse is parallel with Horner’s (2011) poststructuralist perspective of language in his “traffic model of linguistic hierarchy” (p. 14). The three key descriptors of Horner’s (2001) model are: social contexts are fluid, practices are effected by the people engaging discourse, and each utterance is temporal. All three aspects of Horner’s (2001) *model of linguistic hierarchy* conceptually correspond to the specific theories of *discourse* as defined by Allan (2008).

Consequently, policy discourse analysis, as compared to other strands of discourse studies (van Dijk, 2011), is uniquely positioned to examine the current complexities in the policy landscape of developmental English education. As stated before, those complexities include numerous major policy shifts that have occurred in the last 10 years to developmental education; for example, the push for performance-based funding (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009), the call to eliminate all need for developmental education (Complete College America, 2012), and the work to override colleges’ control of student placement in developmental education through state-level congressional policy (Mangan, 2014). The productive power of policy, which generates “sociopolitical realities” (Allan, 2009, p. 12), was the focus of this inquiry.

The research methodology I utilized drew from numerous past studies that employed multiple variations of policy discourse analysis. Previous scholarship has shown how the power of discourses has impacted and shaped leadership and policy environments in post-secondary institutions (Allan, 2008; Bensimon, 1995; Bertrand, 2015; Iverson, 2008) and women’s status in postsecondary institutions (Allan, 2003). More closely tied to this inquiry’s focus, as stated in the introduction, Bertrand et al.

(2015) utilized discourse analysis to show that policymakers have utilized deficit discourse to make educational attainment gaps “appear natural through the use of several sub-strategies, including obscuring the identity of those harmed by inequality” (p. 2). Thus, scholars have shown how discourses are operationalized (Fairclough, 2013), constructing possibilities for educational policy in relationship to educational attainment gaps (Bertrand et al., 2015). Likewise, scholars have shown that access to higher education is shaped by policy discourses affecting opportunity programs (Hinsdale, 2012) and undocumented students (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2010). Moreover, Suspitsyna (2012) delineated “the colonization of higher education discourse by the economy” (p. 59) through an analysis of 163 U.S. Department of Education speeches. Thus, there is a precedent of using discourse analysis to analyze current education policy discourses, decisions, and debates.

Equally important is the fact that policy discourse analysis is positioned to identify ideologies that operate through discourse (Allan, 2008). Ideologies can be thought of as a set of ideas that are “shared by the members of a specific group and that the ideology generally is in the interest of a group-often featuring evaluative positions” (van Dijk, 2011, p. 384). Finally, the justification for scholarship on developmental education policy through a theory of discourse is salient because of the potential impact of current trends in policy on historically marginalized groups of students (Bailey et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2010; Boroch et al., 2010), including English language learners, and because of efficacy (evaluative judgment) debates (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012).



### **Paradigmatic challenges of policy discourse analysis.**

One issue thus far undiscussed is the problematic nature of using a methodology that synthesizes competing epistemic and ontological assumptions, namely critical and poststructuralist paradigms of inquiry (Allan, 2008; Fairclough, 2013). Policy discourse analysis situates itself between critical and poststructural paradigms of inquiry in order to identify and deconstruct discourses that produce “truths” (Allan, 2008) and to consequently emancipate objectified and subjugated “marginalized voices” (Jardine, 2005) or marginalized groups (van Dijk, 2008). On the one hand, poststructuralist theories argue that discourses do not operate in simple, dualist modes of dominated groups and domineering groups (Allan, 2008; Phillips & Burbules, 2000; van Dijk, 2008). On the other hand, critical paradigms operate under a separate and opposing assumption that the marginalization of groups of specific people is an indisputable fact, a fact that critical scholars are working against (Allan, 2008; Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009a). This tension between universal and non-universal truths has been accepted by scholars who nevertheless utilize theories from both critical and poststructural strands of inquiry (Allan, 2008; Horner & Lu, 1999; van Dijk, 2011), in part because of the temporality of any singular truth in a given social and historic moment. Equally important, scholars have integrated both inquiry paradigms in previous work (Horner & Lu, 1999); hence the seeming mutual exclusivity of the inquiry paradigms has already been challenged, as scholars transverse paradigmatic boundaries to develop hybrid methodologies like policy discourse analysis (Allan, 2008).

One idea that allows for theories from both inquiry paradigms to be synthesized is the notion that inquiry paradigms are incomplete or imperfect categories (Maxwell, 2013)

and that scholars, instead of working from concrete delineated theories, alter and synthesize their theoretical and conceptual frameworks to adapt for the purposes of answering particular research questions (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, critical discourse analysis, which falls squarely under critical paradigms of inquiry (Fairclough, 2013), pays special attention to “how language works within power relations” (S. Taylor, 2004, p. 436). Thus, the integration of critical frames of inquiry and discourse analysis has been theoretically developed in the discourse studies field (van Dijk, 2011).

In the case of policy discourse analysis, scholars need not adhere to a binary model of oppressed and oppressor groups (Allan, 2008), nor must they ascribe to hegemonic, or Marxist, definitions of ideology (van Dijk, 2009). Instead, this study follows Allan’s (2008) work by acknowledging multiple discourses while realizing that “some discourses appear to be dominant because they tend to obscure other discourses that may offer alternate perspectives” (p. 21). In consequence, effects of power are exerted not only by the institutionalized discourses that are readily circulated but also by the silences of multiple alternate discourses. Thus, through both locating discourse in a local and historical context, and through realizing a multiplicity of discourses, a range of potential effects of dominant discourses can be acknowledged without claiming a universality to the findings.

Finally, as stated in the introduction, as a critical scholar, I want to foreground two assumptions that underlie this investigation. First, I believe access to higher education is a public good that supports a free, equitable, and open democracy. Second, I assume that developmental English education is a point of access to higher education because of its role as an entry-level course in collegiate curricula.

## Methods

### **Data selection and sampling criteria.**

“Few data are better to study ideologies than text and talk, because it is largely through discourse and other semiotic messages, rather than by other ideological practices, that the context of ideologies can be explicitly articulated, justified, or explained” (van Dijk, 2009, p. 387). Following past practice in policy discourse analysis (Allan, 2003; Allan et al., 2006; Iverson, 2008; van Dijk, 2011) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009b), I reviewed policy documents, not speech transcriptions, because of the potential greater impact these documents have had on wide audiences of policymakers and scholars (Fairclough, 2013; Saarinen, 2008; van Dijk, 2011). One challenge in sampling policy documents was that no authoritative bibliography or database existed that housed all policy documents pertaining to developmental education. Thus, I could not draw a sample of documents in the precise form of past practice.

For example, Gildersleeve and Hernandez (2012) sampled 12 In-State Resident Tuition (ISRT) policies for document analysis because at the time of their study only 12 states in the U.S. had ISRT policies. In the same fashion, Suspitsyna (2012) utilized 164 speeches from the U.S. Department of Education from a three-year period to analyze the role of federal economic discourses in educational policy. For this dissertation, a logical site from which to draw a sample of documents was not readily available as in these two examples. Because of the research questions driving this dissertation, I had a wider range of focus for study and thus needed a broader sampling strategy.

For this reason, comprehensive sampling of documents best describes the sampling approach that was used (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The policy documents used in this study come from two main sources: documents from private think-tank and research companies or non-profits (e.g., Complete College America) and documents from professional postsecondary associations (e.g., Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) or research centers associated within colleges or universities (e.g., UCLA Graduate School of Education). These two groups were chosen for their potential impact on policy because of their relative credibility and capacity to market their policy briefs to policymakers. In contrast, peer-reviewed academic literature was assumed to not be a primary source of information for policymakers; the same logic applies to internal policies set by postsecondary institutional themselves. Policy briefs from these think-tanks and professional postsecondary organizations were then a middle ground where scholarship and policy meets in influential social markets.

Additionally, the documents were addressed to two broad categories of audiences: national level policy or state specific policy. The value in obtaining documents from multiple levels of policy creation is supported by the concept of intertextuality, first created by Bakhtin, which “is the idea that any text is a link in a chain of texts, reacting to, drawing on, and transforming other texts” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2009, p. 361). This also aligns with the sampling logic of other scholars who used critical discourse analysis to analyze educational policy discourses “By casting this broad net, we were acknowledging that influence in education policy originates from a range of sectors in society, not just the legislature” (Bertrand et al., p. 10).

To gather a list of potential policy documents, I utilized Google Scholar, Google, and the University of Maine's *One Search* feature to search for the following key terms: policy, policy brief, policy report, developmental education, remediation, and basic skills. From this search, I downloaded over 100 original documents that contained these terms in either their title, abstract, or executive summary. The final sample of documents were selected on several criteria, including the date of publication, the focus on postsecondary institutions as compared to high schools, the stated or intended audience, the relative prestige of the organization, and the explicit mention of policy focused solutions. The relative prestige of an organizations was conceptualized broadly, meaning that documents were not excluded because I was unaware of the organization prior to the research. Instead, documents were removed from the sample if their credibility could not be reasonably established or if the policy brief was clearly generated for the use within a single institution instead of across postsecondary institutions or state policy arenas. Numerous documents were eliminated from the initial sample because they either referred to the developmental education of children in grade school or they were reference sheets for state discussions that contained little text. A full list of documents used in this study can be found in Appendix A: List of Policy Documents.

In sum, 42 documents were selected within range of 2005 to 2015 to account for current discourses about developmental English education. As stated previously, policy debates concerning developmental education, like the one in the CUNY system (Soliday, 2002), have been prominent in the past. Because discourses are conceptualized as changing over time (van Dijk, 2011), I reasoned that discourses operating within debates of the 1990s and early 2000s may be different than the current policy discourses because

scholars identified important discursive elements from the CUNY debates of the 1990s (Soliday, 2002). Provided the value of this investigation lies in making contributions to *current* policy and scholarship, the range of 10 years (2005-2015) was chosen to allow for a large enough sample but also one that can reasonably be argued to contain current discourses. This aligns with the rationale of Gildersleeve and Hernandez (2012) who used a ten-year range when conducting policy discourse analysis on current state statutes that impacted in-state resident tuition for undocumented students.

Equally important, documents were also chosen for their evidence of reach or potential impact on policy. A growing trend of research tracking that is becoming increasingly commonplace across academic disciplines is to follow the effects of policy documents (Blaum, Griffin, Wiley, & Britt, 2016), as well as research (Bornmann, 2012) through metrics like impact factors. An initial attempt to quantify an impact factor for the chosen policy documents was abandoned because tracking analytics, if captured, are the property of each individual institution that generated the policy brief or report. This subsequently made the idea of an impact factor difficult to obtain, so alternate criteria were therefore developed. The indicators of reach that guided the sampling included: the stated or intended audience, the relative prestige of the organization, and the explicit mention of policy-based solutions.

The data sample's impact on policy is clearly evidenced within numerous documents. For example, one document contains a reference to the organization's acquisition of 30 governors' signatures; these governors were cited as supporting the association's policy stance to stop teaching developmental coursework in all postsecondary institutions in the nation (Complete College America, 2012). Another

document is the written brief that was submitted to Texas' House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education (Boylan & Saxon, 2009). Similarly, the relative prestige of The Brookings Institute or of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) were considered indicators of reach. Finally, if a document was only meant to be read by constituents of a single postsecondary institution, it was assumed that the reach of the document did not substantially impact broader national discourses in a robust way.

### **Descriptive data about primary policy documents.**

This section summarizes information collected about the documents for full disclosure of the data sample. Supporting information can be found in Appendix B. The 28 primary documents had an average length of 19.78 pages, with a median of 10.5 pages. Twenty-one documents were authored for national policy audiences, while seven were focused at specific state audiences including: California, Connecticut, New York, North Carolina, and Texas. Thirteen of the 28 documents used academic citations, defined as having more than one peer-reviewed reference<sup>13</sup>; 15 of the remaining documents had references, and 3 documents had no references. Moreover, the documents had an average of 24.5 citations, and a median of 16 citations.

One research question posed, as previously noted, was: What are the central subject positions expressed for developmental students and developmental faculty? To ensure the documents had data on the topics of faculty and students, I generated Likert scales to measure the documents' depth of focus on students and faculty so that a density of discussion could be determined. Importantly, the scale did not describe the content but

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<sup>13</sup> While numerous policy documents referenced material from reasonably credible sources (e.g., The Community College Research Center at Columbia University), the definition here of peer-reviewed was chosen as a marker of strict academic rigor.

rather only the total amount of data present on a given research question topic. The depth of discussion does not refer to a word count of *students* or *faculty* in the documents. Rather “depth of discussion” denoted if the authors provided descriptive data about topics like academic preparation and student age, race, and socioeconomic status. Simply, should the documents have ignored the roles of students or faculty (of which some did), then these documents could not provide data on the given research questions. However, the cumulative Likert scale rating average focus on student discussions for the documents was 2.67, falling between little and moderate discussion.<sup>14</sup> The Likert scale rating average focus on faculty discussions for the documents was 2.21, also falling between little and moderate discussion, but closer to the little discussion mark.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Likert scales solely justify that the sample of data did include relevant information in relation to the research questions without further analysis of those data.

Finally, 12 of the documents made explicit mention of one of these following third party, think-tank institutions: Achieving the Dream, the MDRC, Complete College America, or Jobs for the Future. This shows the role of these institutions in policy formation. Again, the role of these organizations in both research and policy has been critiqued in current scholarly literature (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Four documents were summative policy reports (much longer and detailed, usually intended for a specific, targeted audience), eight were policy reports (documents that reported on current policy initiatives and made recommendations), and the remaining 16 were policy briefs (focused on policy recommendations without reporting extensively on current practices).

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<sup>14</sup> Likert Scale (1= very little discussion, 2=little discussion, 3=moderate discussion, 4= detailed discussion, 5= very detailed discussion).

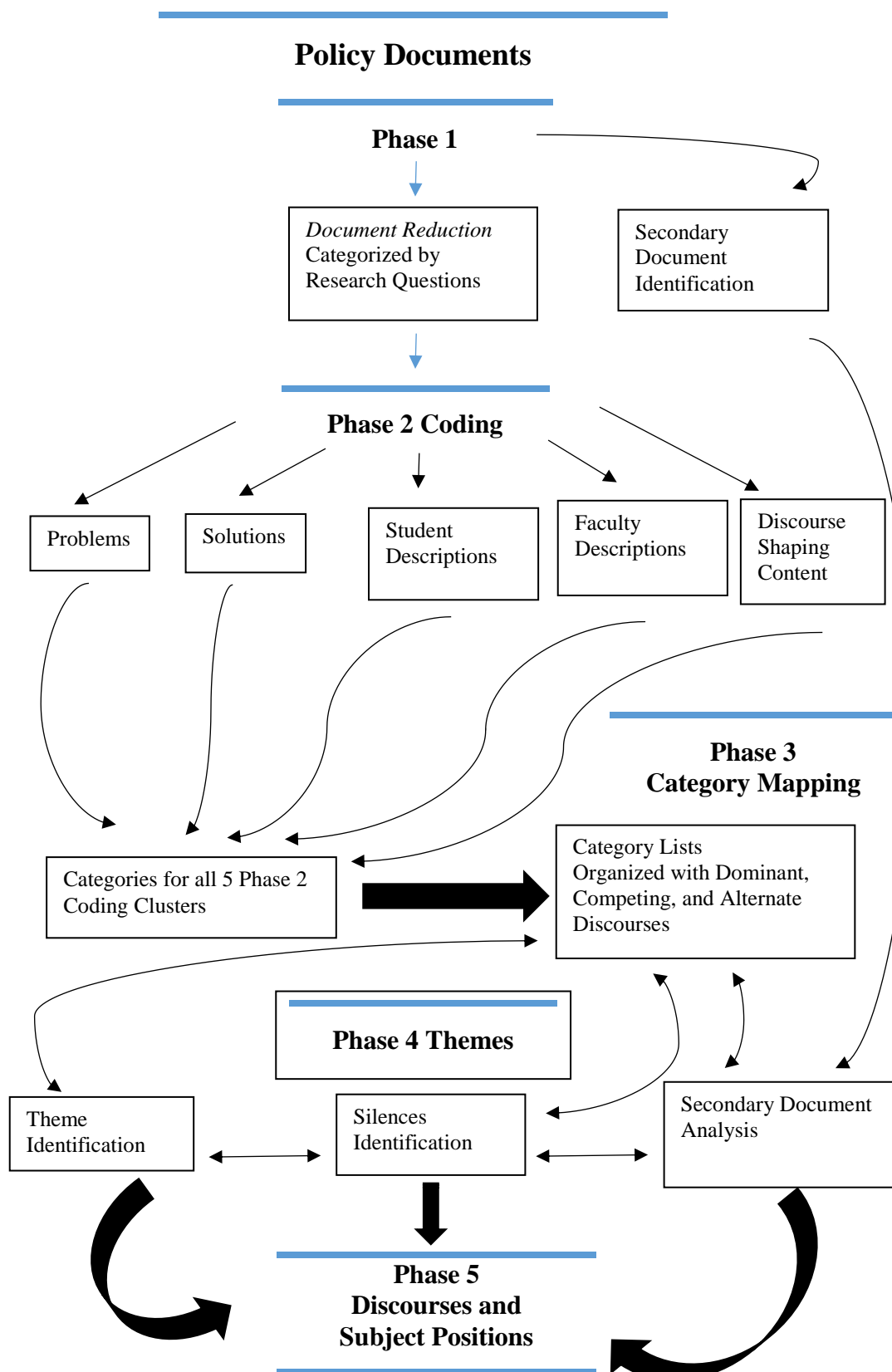
<sup>15</sup> Likert Scale (1= very little discussion, 2=little discussion, 3=moderate discussion, 4= detailed discussion, 5= very detailed discussion).



### **Data analysis.**

Because poststructural perspectives deny claims of universal truths (Lather, 1996), this research did not utilize pre-established definitions of *challenges* or *complexities* facing developmental English education or *student success* theories, as the constructs would counteract the assumptions of the inquiry paradigm. Therefore, while some scholars (Bertrand et al., 2015) have utilized “a priori ‘structural’ codes” (p. 11) to categorize sections of data for further analysis, my research questions asked what the documents defined as problems and solutions for developmental education (not predetermined constructs). I followed other scholars like Allan (2008) who built a coding process through grounded methodologies where knowledge was inductively built on the present data (Maxwell, 2013), based on a broader series of grounded designs (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Seidman, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The systematic process using phases of analysis, in the tradition of previous policy discourse analysis scholarship (Allan, 2008), is delineated Figure 1: Data Analysis Process. Each of the analytic phases is further explained in the subsequent sub-sections.

Figure 1: Data Analysis Process



### **Phase 1: summative readings.**

As indicated in Figure 1, reflective analytic notes were drafted throughout the data analysis process. They were later used for both the purposes of researcher reflexivity and data triangulation. In the first phase of analysis, I read each document in its entirety, determining if it should be utilized as a primary or secondary source and working to ensure it was indeed relevant to the study. Of the initial 42 documents, I removed three from the sample because two were focused on high school issues of persistence and graduation almost exclusively, and one was a short, repetitive version of a longer document. In all, 28 documents were subsequently used as primary documents and 11 were moved to secondary document status. The list of documents can be found in Appendix A. The reasons for moving a document to secondary status included: a) that the authors only reported on developmental education without giving explicit policy recommendations, b) that they were studies themselves into the effect of one specific policy or set of policies on a localized context, or c) that they focused almost exclusively on the K-12 end of the educational pipeline with lesser discussion of colleges and universities. Lastly in phase 1, I reduced the primary 28 documents by identifying the relevant sections according to each research question, identifying the sections with a highlighting system for future coding. With a full reading of each document completed, the documents sorted into primary and secondary data sources, and the relevant sections identified by research questions, I turned to phase two: coding.

### **Phase 2: coding.**

Before beginning coding during phase 2, I organized an Excel table for notes gathered throughout the coding process in relation to each policy document. In this Excel

table, I tabulated descriptive data about the documents including: the organizational type (Think-Tank or College Association); the number of pages; the number of references; the use of academic peer-reviewed references, measured as two or more peer-reviewed journals; my initial scoring of each of the documents' depth of discussion concerning students and faculty according to the simple Likert scale previously explained; the funding agency or agencies; and other notes. This table is Appendix B: Phase 2 Document Notes.

To begin phase 2, I imported each document into ATLAS.ti 7 ("ATLAS.ti 7 [Computer Software],"), a software program designed for coding qualitative data. I established a method of line by line, first-cycle deductive coding and employed a mix of in-vivo coding, process coding, and holistic coding, as described by Miles et al. (2014), by first working through three documents. I chose multiple types of coding based on how the research questions were framed, focusing on whether descriptive data or conceptual data was the goal. Specifically, I utilized in-vivo coding to capture the language used by the authors when describing problems, solutions, students and faculty, following the practice of in-vivo coding defined by Miles et al. (2014). Likewise, I utilized process coding and holistic coding to attend to the "observable and conceptual action[s] in the data" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 75) when focused on policy recommendations and discourse shaping commentary.

This concept of *discourse shaping* commentary was conceptually vague in the initial research design; however, a thorough review later showed a focus on policies' and policymakers' agency, the ideological assumptions of authors, and the authors' research methodological preferences. Essentially, *discourse shaping* coding illustrated in part the

positionality of policy and policymakers. Later analysis showed that coded solutions also sometimes indicated subject positions for policy. This emergent concept is developed more in Chapter 7, where I address why the vagueness of this concept was part of the initial design.

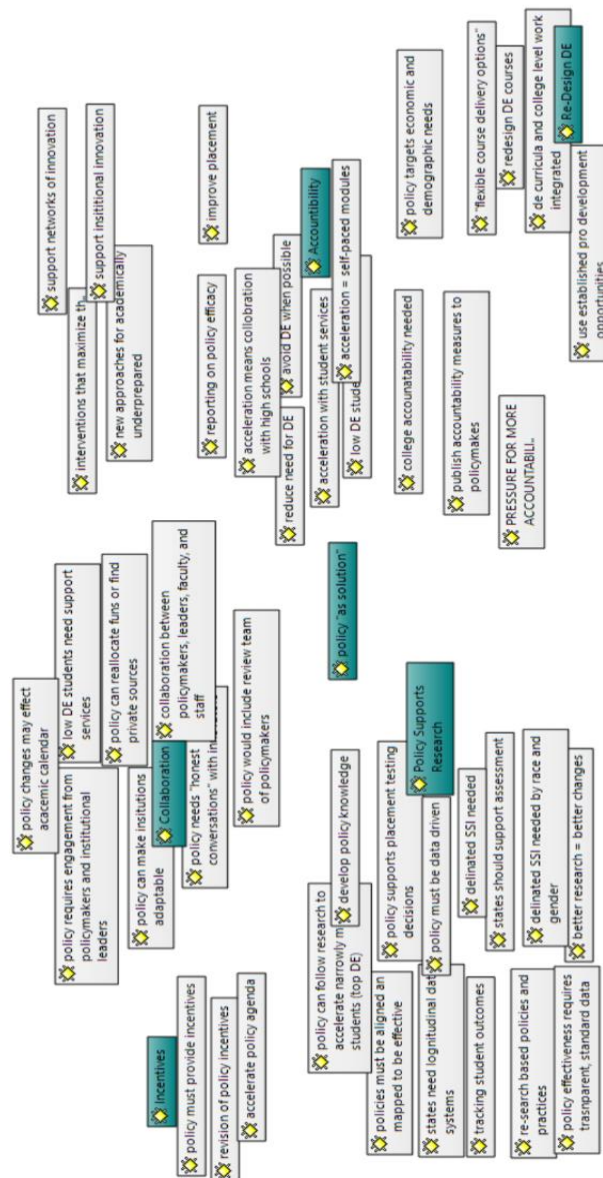
The resulting work of phase 2 produced more than 1,800 codes, which were later grouped into category maps based on research questions in phase 3. Simultaneous to this second phase of coding, I wrote mini-summaries of each policy document in the form of an annotated bibliography and used the subsequent summaries for data triangulation in my analysis.

### **Phase 3: category mapping.**

To ensure I coded sections of policy documents consistently based on my research questions, and to further ensure I consistently identified the boundary of each case, the first work of phase 3 was spent building category maps for codes through a within-case analysis, meaning comparing codes from within a single document. I made this choice following the logic that “a primary goal of within-case analysis is to describe, understand, and explain what has happened in a single, bounded context – the case or site” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 100). This within-case analysis improves the validity of the coding by showing that the boundary of each research question was clearly demarcated in the coding process. Simply, if I could not group the codes into meaningful categories based on my research questions within a single document, then my coding process would have failed to differentiate the data according to the research questions, and the credibility of the results would lessen, becoming a “close reading” instead of rigorous, systematic analysis.

As one example of this process, Figure 2, below, represents the outcome of analyzing “policy solutions” from the document by the Achieving the Dream (2012) organization.

Figure 2: Within-Case Categorization Map



Having completed this work of within-case analysis, I was satisfied with the rigor of my coding process from phase two because I could easily and clearly group the codes. Subsequently, I began the larger categorization work. Moving forward in phase 3, I shifted the analysis pattern from within-case analysis to cross-case analysis in response to the goals of the research. Again, the main goal was to identify the dominant discourses in policy documents for national and state audiences, not the dominant discourse of a single document or case. Put simply, the data could have been *selectively culled* for extreme cases by finding inflammatory language in a single document and claiming it was representative of all discourses within the greater documents, what would be a major flaw in research design. Assuredly, one of the challenges of discourse analysis is that scholars have to show their interpretations are not close readings of extreme positions motivated by the scholar's personal viewpoints but that the findings are evidence-based assertions that have emerged from systematic and rigorous analysis from a reasonably representative set of data (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). I utilized an analytic pattern of cross-case analysis, following Miles et al.'s (2014) rationale that "one advantage of studying cross-case or multiple cases is to increase generalizability, reassuring yourself that the events and processes in one well-described setting are not wholly idiosyncratic" (p. 101). Yet, as Miles et al. (2014) noted, developing a quality cross-case analysis is not easy because any particular case or any particular document in my data sample, varied greatly in fundamental ways from another case. As a result, the shift from the within-case analysis coding in phase 2 to the cross-case analysis in phase 3 through category mapping bolstered the credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability of the findings in relationship to the sample of data.

Because I had ensured the rigor of the analytic process with the initial within-case analysis on two documents, I then shifted from the *case-oriented approach* to a *variable-oriented approach*. Miles et al. (2014) explained:

The variable-centered approach is conceptual and theory centered from the start, casting a wide net over a (usually large) number of cases. The building blocks are variables and their interrelationships, rather than cases. So the details of any specific case recede behind the broad patterns found across a wide variety of cases... (p. 102).

To follow this variable-oriented approach, I imported all the codes based on each research question category (problems, solutions, students, faculty, discourse shaping) into separate ATLAS.ti network views ("ATLAS.ti 7 [Computer Software],") to build category maps. These *categories* correspond conceptually to the *variables* in the variables-oriented approach of Miles et al. (2014), but I chose the word *categories* so as to not confound the language of quantitative variables often used in causal research (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

In sum, by building the category maps in these network views in Atlas, without each codes' relationship to a particular policy document, I followed cross-case methods of qualitative design to enhance the trustworthiness and generalizability of the emergent categories for each research question (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Put differently, by separating codes from their documents, phase 3 shifted the trustworthiness of the data from reliance on each single documents' discourses to the holistic summation of the discourses in relationship to the research questions. Thus, I established which



discourses were *dominant*, in part, from this holistic cross-case analysis, not from single documents.

In total, I generated six category maps in relationship to the research questions including: problems, students, faculty, discourse shaping, solutions of policy and solutions of practice. The category maps had on average of 313 codes. While there was only one research question focused on solutions, I divided the greater *solutions map* into the two sub-group topics: 1) solutions that were proposed changes in policy and 2) solutions that proposed changes to the practices of institutions. This was done for two reasons. First, the two groups of solutions logically emerged in the coding process itself. Second, because there were 869 codes for solutions, manageability necessitated a workable number of codes from which to build category maps.

As an example of these category maps built in phase 3, Figure 3, on the next page, illustrates a small subsection from the *problems category* map focused on developmental education outcomes, to show what the category maps look like. While an extensive list of category map images is not included, I reduced the category maps into individual lists of categories and sub-categories and included them for reference as Appendix C: Coding Category Summaries.



Again, to build the category maps, each code was grouped based on the topic in relation to the research questions, not its document of origin. Therefore, the number of codes for a specific sub-topic indicated an imperfect measure of topic density within the documents. However, triangulation with analytic notes, reflective summaries, and further analysis then allowed me to identify when topics were dominant, intermediately important, bifurcated or competing topics, or if topics were alternate to the dominant discussion. Thus, dominance was not established by merely counting the number of times an issue was mentioned; instead, language choice, visibility, and the pervasiveness of the idea across the documents were the determinates. Dominance of a discourse was established through a holistic balance of the number of authors who utilized the discourse, the language used within the discourse, the density of codes supporting a given topic, and triangulation of secondary document analysis. Intermediate and alternate themes were also identified. Comparatively, dominant themes were pervasive across the strong majority of the data and eclipsed alternate ideas or hypotheses. Intermediate themes were found in the majority of data but were not so pervasive as to eclipse alternate ideas. Alternate themes were found in a plurality, not a majority of data, and they specifically occurred when two or more ideas emerged that competed for dominance without a clear pervasive leading idea across the data. Some scholars have reported the precise number of authors who utilized a particular discourse or the number of documents with a given discourse as dominant (Bertrand et al., 2015) through mostly quantitative measures. Indeed, a computer could count words for density, and while that may indicate a level of dominance, this quantitatively based validity did not logically follow within the methodological approach of this study. Thus, throughout discussion chapters, I note

dominant discourses based on this holistic analysis of dominance, not numeric summations.

#### **Phase 4. themes.**

Working from these category maps and summative lists, I began phase 4 of the analysis to identify themes and silences within the data. I followed tenets of policy discourse analysis that “allow for themes, patterns, and stories to emerge on multiple levels” (Allan, 2008, p. 61). Since coding alone does not itself provide all the adequate data or insight for discourse analysis (Allan, 2008; van Dijk, 2009), the work in this fourth phase was elementary to the credibility of the findings because I worked *across* the accumulated data of coding, analytic notes, and summaries, to begin identifying the discourses that undergird current policy discussions. Here, I focused on the idea of discourse fragments presented by Jäger and Maier (2009), namely the context, surface of the text, rhetorical means, and content of ideological statements (p. 55). I also worked to employ van Dijk’s (2009) concepts concerning semantic structures (p. 397), for example granularity, to more deeply analyze the sentence level codes from the earlier analysis.

By having the initial phase 1 and phase 2 notes, my continuous analytic reflections, as well as detailed coding category maps from phase 3, I developed the themes, identified subsequently, found in Appendix D: Themes. At this point, I also listed the numerous topics authors gave little or no attention towards, policy silences. Finally, I read the secondary documents in relationship to the themes looking for sub-topics of discourse undiscussed in the primary documents. Through the triangulation of the reflective notes and secondary documents analysis, I tabulated all the silences, found in Appendix E: Silences.

The summative work of phase four culminated in identifying themes within the documents. The policy document authors drew upon discourses to articulate the following themes, also found in Appendix D.

- A need for workforce and state or national economic competitiveness drives the need to fix developmental education.
- Developmental education is a broken system that does not work based on poor student graduation rates and labor market outcomes.
- Standardized assessment, curricula, pedagogy, and developmental education programs, all mandated through state policy, will allow quality efficacy research to determine what works for developmental education.
- Students are poor minorities who come from broken K-12 systems and need access to the workforce through vocational training.
- Fixing the educational pipeline from high school to college requires aligned K-12 curricula, improved placement with mandated multiple measures, and fixed college readiness standards.
- Fixing developmental education itself requires retraining faculty, increasing ancillary supports for students, and redesigning curricula through acceleration.
- Policy must centralize DE oversight in the state, mandating standardized assessment, placement, curricula, pedagogy, and by collecting data on the efficacy of these practices.
- Policy must create accountability using the incentives of command, defined performance based metrics, and the implementation of performance-based funding.

### **Phase 5. discourses and subject positions.**

Lastly, phase 5 consisted of analyzing how the data coalesced the work into distinct policy discourses shaping developmental English education and the subject positions for students, faculty, and policymakers therein. Discourse titles were chosen to holistically represent larger themes in the data. Discussion of the interaction of these discourses through interdiscursivity follows in subsequent chapters.

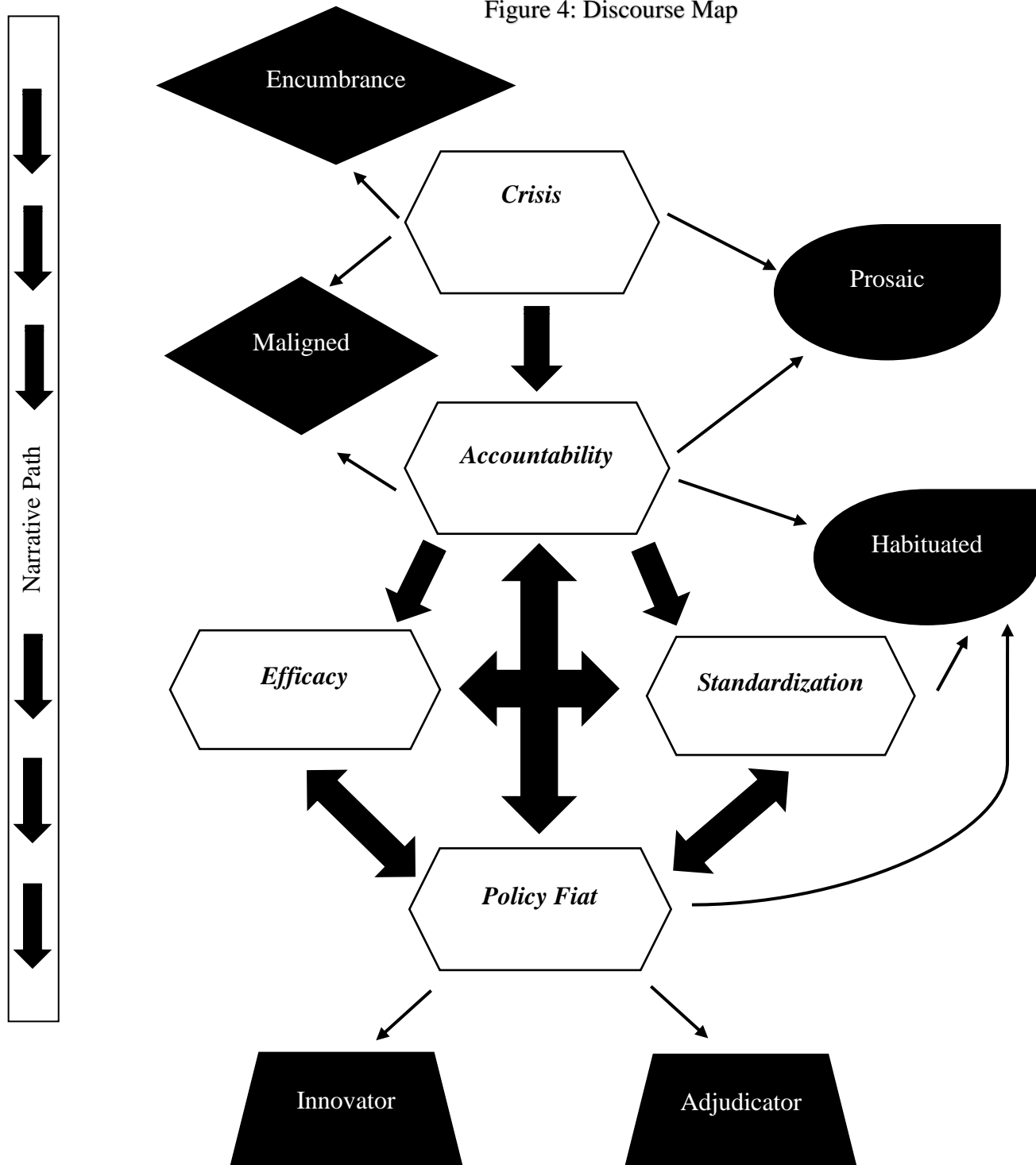
Before continuing, it should first be noted that the traditional sections of a dissertation, the results and discussion, are absent from the format of this dissertation. This choice was simple. The work to display the discourses and show ample evidence through direct citations of texts is so exhaustive that it is prudent to both identify the discourses and simultaneously analyze them rather than discuss them hierarchically or linearly. Thus, this section operates to support the credibility of the identified discourses with subsequent chapters that analyze the major discourses in turn, both showing textual evidence for them, and thoroughly reviewing their implications.

Five major discourses were identified as dominantly shaping developmental English education: crisis, accountability, standardization, efficacy, and policy fiat. These discourses construct subject positions for students as the maligned or as encumbrances, for faculty as prosaic or habituated, and policymakers as adjudicators or innovators.

Figure 4, the discourse map shown on page 97, demonstrates the relationships between these discourses and how they shaped subject positions for students, faculty, and policy/policymakers. Conceptually, the authors of the policy documents followed a normative narrative path through these discourses. With this dominant narrative path in

mind, I recall that the significance of this work lies in “uncover[ing] policy silences and mak[ing] visible the powerful discourses framing policy initiatives” (Allan, 2003, p. 1).

Figure 4: Discourse Map



Converting this image into prose, the policy document authors' narratives began with an assumption of an economic and workforce crisis caused by a lack of educated workers, an encumbrance to society. Developmental education, postsecondary institutions, and prosaic faculty were blamed for this crisis which was evidenced by poor graduation and workforce outcomes of maligned students. Accountability to the students, taxpayers, and state governments drove the need to respond to the crisis. The solution arose to organize the standardization of programs and data as well as implement efficacious practices. The documents' authors argued a way forward with policy initiating and innovating change and with policymakers adjudicating the results of new habitual practices.

In Figure 4, the unshaded hexagons identify the discourses while the shaded shapes represent subject positions. The diamonds are the subject positions of students, oval-like teardrops are subject positions of faculty, and the trapezoids are the subject positions of policymakers. As can be seen in Figure 4, the discourses are conceptualized as working through interdiscursivity (Bertrand et al., 2015) to synergistically shape subject positions. Interdiscursivity has been seen as "occur[ing] when different discourses and genres are articulated together in a communicative event. Through new articulations of discourses, the boundaries change, both within the order of discourse and between different orders of discourse" (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2004, p. 73). Furthermore, "interdiscursivity signifies that discourses are linked to each other in various ways" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009a, p. 90). Thus, as seen in Figure 4, the discourses are shown to intersect and influence one another along a dominant narrative path. For example, while the crisis discourse alone generated the subject position of encumbrance for students, the



maligned subject position of students was generated by the interplay of both the crisis and accountability discourses. As a result, I work in subsequent chapters to show how the narrative path both leads from one discourse to the next while surreptitiously generating new subject positions as layers of discourse engage intertextually (Bakhtin, 2010).

As a note, subject positions are conceptualized as temporal identities or places of agency from which the subjects act. The range, limits, and boundaries of such action are produced by the power of discourses (Allan, 2008; Iverson, 2008). The discourses construct subject position then as opportunities, speech objects that replace or stand in for individuals and groups. Subject positions are thus dynamic, non-permanent, and importantly not descriptive of all positions that subjects may hold (Allan, 2008). It is crucial to remember that I discuss the dominant subject positions produced by the discourses within the policy documents not my desired constructions or alternate subject positions.

### **Credibility**

Experts in research design generally agree that the methods and methodology employed in a specific study are central components to supporting the credibility of results (Creswell, 2013; J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). I agree with social science scholars that the methods chosen to conduct a study are driven primarily by the research questions asked (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010), as well as the goals, conceptual frameworks, and aspects of validity/credibility (Maxwell, 2013). The breadth of the literature reviewed showed that a wide variety of positions are held by scholars on what problems exist for developmental English education. Thinking of the data gathered and analysis provided here, it is clear that no singular truth applies to how policy briefs and

policy reports discuss problems, solutions, students, or faculty, with developmental education, as evidenced by both dominant and alternate discourses operating within the data. Therefore, my choice in policy discourse analysis, as a methodology to inquire about which positions were reflected in policy briefs, was warranted. A positivist framework would be incapable of attending to the multiple, dialectical, synergistic, and competing discourses shaping developmental English education policy as it would direct a scholar to search for a singular truth in the discourse.

While I agree that the methods and methodologies are critical to the credibility of findings, the inquiry paradigm of poststructuralism does not rest all credibility on methods. Instead, I concur with Maxwell (2013), who wrote “The view that methods *could* guarantee validity was characteristic of early forms of positivism, which held that scientific knowledge could ultimately be reduced to a logical system that was securely grounded in irrefutable sense data” (p. 121). This idea that methods only, the properly selected tool, could *guarantee* accuracy, reliability, and validity has been thoroughly critiqued by scholars who conduct research from a range of perspectives (Kvale, 1995; Lather, 1993; Maxwell, 2013; Scheurich, 1996). In fact, numerous scholars have called for broader preparation of educational researchers (Eisenhart & DeHaan, 2005) in methodological and paradigmatic forms of research (Berliner, 2002; Erickson & Gutierrez, 2002; G. Thomas, 2012) in order to create epistemic diversity in inquiry. Thus, I agree with Maxwell (2013) and intentionally chose his interactive model of research design because “validity is a property of inferences rather than methods, and is never something that can be proved or taken for granted on the basis of the methods used” (p. 121).

Furthermore, it is possible that my positionality as a developmental English instructor for seven years, at two postsecondary institutions, biased my insights and conclusions from the data, shifting towards a complimentary review of faculty and developmental education and a skepticism of policy. However, I intentionally understood this challenge embedded in policy discourse analysis, that the scholar is the “tool” for analysis. To reduce these biases, I engaged in a number of reflexive (Phillips & Burbules, 2000) practices including keeping reflective analytic notes and data triangulation.

Above all, the goals of this research were not to champion nor denounce any particular constituency within higher education or policy arenas. There was no intent to be for or against developmental education. Moreover, I have worked to be transparent about supporting access to higher education. I don’t care which tools, methods or practices provide access; instead, I care that access is provided. Again, I chose a grounded methodology where the “problems,” “solutions” and the subject positions for students, faculty, and policymakers were not described by me but by a clear, objective method of coding and analyzing data. This choice of a grounded methodology is the keystone of the credibility of the project. Because I adhered to a theory of research design as elastic, where the methods used must stem not only from research questions but also from the goals, validity, and conceptual frameworks of the design (Maxwell, 2013), I have attempted to both explicate my decisions in research design and transparently showcase the methods of critique.

Second, the fact that I have taught developmental English education for six years at two separate postsecondary institutions adds both simultaneously to my insights into this research project and to the potential bias and complications of my research results.

Indeed, it would be easy for critics to argue that English faculty support developmental English education for the purpose of their own job security, pride, and intellectual prestige. As an English professor, this is precisely part of why I chose to study research design in a social science program. By choosing a clear, delineated, scientific model of inquiry in policy discourse analysis, the credibility of the findings and my subsequent discussion come not from my identity as an English professor but from the rigor with which I conceptualized and designed this research and applied policy discourse analysis. Part of how I engaged this reflexivity was through triangulation of extensive analytic notes. I documented clearly my own personal responses to the data separate from the coding and regularly re-read the analytic notes through each of the five stages of the analysis process to review my positionality as a scholar. Indeed, in each phase of analysis I ensured that the coding, category maps, themes, and identified discourses and subject positions were grounded explicitly in the data, not my analytic notes and personal reflections. Appendices C, D, and E all document my summaries of the data removed from the analytical notes I took throughout the process. Finally, the lengthy efforts to showcase each stage in the inquiry process allows for external critique and improves the credibility above some forms of discourse studies that lack explicit methods of analysis (van Dijk, 2011).

Third, part of the work I did to be transparent was in response to a discussion of reflexivity by Phillips and Burbules (2000). Noting that reflexive practices are an attempt for a scholar to “acknowledge their own role in the research process” (p. 175), I concur that:

... even if we were to follow such reflexive procedures conscientiously, we would never be able to produce fully 'transparent' knowledge, whereby our results would accurately depict reality one-to-one, and whereby we could somehow achieve full control over the effects of the results. (Phillips & Burbules, 2000, p. 175)

Because of this, I worked to clearly convey the precise steps taken from data sampling through all five phases of analysis. By articulating these steps, showing the rationale for how data were collected with specifically chosen coding strategies, based on experts in qualitative analysis (Miles et al., 2014), I have left the steps open to critique. I kept extensive analytic notes from which I both triangulated data and engaged in reflexivity. Likewise, the clear record of which documents were selected for primary or secondary use, found in Appendix B, adds to the transparency. Next, by systematically documenting each phase, the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the discourse analysis were reflected throughout the process, a practice that is critical to ensuring rigor and credibility (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Finally, it is important that I followed multiple scholars' past practice in research design for policy analysis in relationship to higher education (Allan, 2008; Bertrand et al., 2015; Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Suspitsyna, 2012).

In addition, while reading both the primary and secondary documents, I worked to identify disconfirming cases, sites of alternate narrative paths and discourses, many of which are identified in the findings and discussion chapters. The disconfirming cases are used through the discussion chapters to show how alternate discourses did exist in the documents. The credibility of the overall findings can therefore be understood, in part, by how well the narrative path that I identified in the data describes the analyzed documents.

Reflecting further on my positionality, as an English faculty member at a SUNY community college, I have written the college's successful application to the Achieving the Dream network (ATD), and I have taken an appointment to run the college's Student Success Initiative, the group responsible for the college's work with the ATD network. Acknowledgement that I used ATD policy documents in the data sample is thus necessary. As evidenced by the discussion, this relationship did not accord ATD preferential treatment from critique. Likewise, in the conclusions I am clear in saying that responsibility to improve outcomes for developmental education is a shared responsibility between faculty, students, administrators, and policymakers. My goal was not to provide the solutions to fix developmental education nor to critique the efficacy of developmental education. My goal was to describe the discourses that policy document author's draw upon when engaging policy decisions. By identifying those discourses, my contributions show opportunities, when placed in the context of the current academic literature, for broader solutions than what the policy document authors provided. In sum, I have worked to reflect on my positionality as a scholar and faculty member and ensure my findings were grounded in the data, not my teaching experience. I employed multiple known reflexive methods intentionally to improve the credibility of my results. Finally, I believe that external analysis is often the better judge of a scholar's reflexivity in any inquiry where the scholar themselves is part of the research tools.

In spite of this, I also saw my experience in teaching developmental English and in studying English literature at the graduate level as assets to inform my analytic capability, an interdisciplinary capacity that other qualitative scholars had argued for in previous scholarship (Maxwell, 2013). In this sense then, I concur with Maxwell (2013)

that *quality research design* creates credibility by balancing the value of experience used for analytical insight with the potential drawbacks of biases. By working from a methodology grounded in the data of policy documents, not pre-established concepts, and by also acknowledging the historical and current symbolic power of ideological discourses, this work has posited new ideas about developmental education by repositioning the concept of educational preparedness and suggesting a theory of access be formulated to include multiple layers of campus ecology. I have also explained how the discourses shape the policy landscape. Both of these tasks are vital to credible applications of policy discourse analysis (Allan, 2008, p. 67). As a scholar applying poststructuralist methods, I do not posit these findings as categorically true but relatively credible in particular policy landscapes.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of all studies are in part a function of research design and goals (Maxwell, 2013; J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010; Miles et al., 2014). While one goal was to identify national level discourses impacting developmental English education, it cannot be assumed that the findings will be transferable to all specific cases (states, localities, or individual institutions) because of the wide variety of legal, policy, and fiscal landscapes in higher education (Heller, 2011; Kaplin & Lee, 2007). As Parker et al. (2014) showed in their study of 100 leaders in five states, policies concerning developmental education vary greatly between states. Assuredly, a comparison of the documents based on their intended or real audience, later in the discussion chapters, shows that the state level documents more commonly purported alternate themes to the more dominant national discourses of crisis, accountability, standardization, efficacy, and

policy fiat. Simply, while the discourses identified *do* construct realities for developmental education, these possibilities may not describe a particular case for a given postsecondary institution or state.

This said, the project's worth does rest in part on the transferability of the results. The transferability of results is often conceptualized as the ability of a sample of data to accurately and reliably reflect a separate population (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Here, the sampling of data, the process of finding relevant policy reports and briefs, was challenging because no pre-established definitions or boundaries existed for a population of developmental education policy documents. Thus, from this perspective, not all alternate discourses shaping developmental education were likely identified. However, because of the process of sampling, I argue that it is likely that the dominant discourses and subject positions that were identified are credibly part of the current landscape of policy discourses shaping developmental education. Considering the links to similar discourses identified by scholars who delineated alternate yet parallel discourses impacting US higher education (Bertrand et al., 2015; Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Hinsdale, 2012), this limitation in sampling does not revoke the credibility of the findings in concrete ways. Other discourses likely occur. Moreover, these are temporal discourses, so future applications of policy analysis will be limited by the relevancy of the particular policy field at the time.

Thinking differently about transferability and generalizability:

... the generalizability of qualitative studies is usually not based on explicit sampling of some defined population to which the results can be extended, but on the development of a theory of the *process* operating in the case studied, one that



may well operate in other cases, but that may produce different outcomes in different circumstances. (Maxwell, 2013, p. 138)

I did contribute multiple findings of process. I work in later chapters to show how authors took up the discourse of crisis, igniting a narrative path whereby discourses of accountability, standardization, and efficacy cumulated in policy fiat as a driving engine of change and evaluation for developmental education. I show how this delineated process employed symbolic power, re-inscribing historic discourses of literacy crises (Fox, 1999), and interdiscursively engaged accountability agendas (Soliday, 2002; Zumeta & Kinne, 2011), discourses of quantitative scientific superiority (Freeman et al., 2007), and current standardization discourses operating across education (Addison, 2015) to justify the use of hierarchical power in policy fiat. This process, showing how the uptake of policy fiat was justified by authors through the production of truth through discourse, is as important a finding as the generalizability of the current dominant discourses because understanding *how* discourse shapes policy was the goal of the study. In sum, I found that the “truths” constructed by taking up dominant discourses assert a harmful theory of developmental education and thus legitimize hierarchal power in policy fiat.

In the chapters that follow, I discuss the discourses, showing evidence of each discourse through excerpts of text from policy documents. Simultaneously, I work to show how the discourses shaped subject positions for the three constituent groups. As these connections are made, I then reflect on implications that are specific to each discourse. Instead of a single section on results followed by a single discussion section, the format of separate chapters for the discourses was chosen to allow for thorough

analysis while remaining intelligible. A few notes here clarify their reading. First, when the term “authors” is used, I am referring to the authors who wrote the policy documents in the data sample. Theoretically, scholars understand that discourses are employed to construct reality (Allan, 2008), that authors employ discourses instead of discourses exerting agency directly (personification). Second, while each chapter stands alone, Figure 4, the discourse map, is the summative picture of how the discourses relate, and thus it operates as a guide throughout all the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER 4: CRISIS

In this chapter, I begin by describing the dominant ideas articulated in the data in relationship to the research question: How are the problems of developmental English education defined in relevant policy documents? The crisis discourse was the most influential in shaping the realities that determine the dominant ideas about “problems” with developmental education. Next, I provide evidence of the crisis discourse within the policy documents through excerpts from the data analyzed in this investigation. Then, I discuss how this discourse contributes to constructing the encumbrance subject position for students. I link the encumbrance subject position to other policy discourse studies, including a recent study where researchers reported similar deficit discourses in higher education policy (Bertrand et al., 2015). Next, I show how this subject position emerges from a history of literacy crisis, recalling the section of the literature review on the history of developmental education. Finally, I describe the second subject position for students, the maligned, produced through current ideas within the crisis discourse that recalibrate the roles for students into more politically palatable terms.

Based on my analysis, the dominant discourses support the following ideas concerning problems with developmental education.

### “Problems” with Developmental Education (DE)

- a. The population of DE students is increasing; these students do not often pass DE sequences or graduate at high rates, which in turn hurts the labor force and nation’s global economic competitiveness, the students’ income potential, and wastes taxpayer money. The issues are caused by:
  - i. inaccurate, high-stakes assessment that cause underplacement;

1. assessments that are not regulated by policy state wide;
2. a lack of policy incentives, policy barriers, a lack of transfer and affordability focused policies;
- ii. and broken traditional DE models and pedagogy issues.

A prevailing narrative of the policy documents analyzed in this investigation framed a crisis where developmental education is harming: 1) students, (Asmussen & Horn, 2014; Bracco, Austin, Bugler, & Finkelstein, 2015; M. L. Collins, 2009, June), 2) state governments and their constituents (Complete College America, 2012; Turk, Nellum, & Soares, 2015), and 3) the workforce (Carroll, 2011; Fulton, 2012; Holzer, 2015; Price & Roberts, 2009). This crisis discourse was intelligible in the data through a series of rhetorical reflections on the status of higher education. Authors of the policy documents spoke to themes found throughout major media within the United States concerning the interplay of the rising cost of higher education and the necessity of a college degree for job employment<sup>16</sup>. For example, “This broken model of remedying students’ academic deficiencies is not sustainable in an era of tight budgets, swelling enrollments, and pressure for more accountability for results” (Achieving the Dream, 2012, p. 2). Other examples of the crisis discourse emerging from the documents include<sup>17</sup>:

The staggering number of college students who require at least one remedial course—40% overall and 58% at community colleges—coupled with low college

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<sup>16</sup> An example of the larger media discourse can be seen in a Consumer Reports (Steele & Williams, August 2016) cover article that discusses student debt with a quote from a young graduate: “I kind of ruined my life by going to college.”

<sup>17</sup> As a note, I intentionally do not follow APA guidelines exactly for formatting all quotes in this and subsequent chapters. Simply, when I list more than one quote as evidence for a claim, I do so in block quotes, even if the quote is less than 40 words. This was done for readability. When first drafted, it was impossible to follow which quotes reflected a list of data, instead of moving the writing forward. This alternate method, in contrast, is intelligible.

success rates for remedial students *threaten* [emphasis added] to undermine national and state efforts to significantly increase postsecondary attainment rates. (Fulton, 2012, p. 1)

“In California, the current developmental education system *prevents the majority* [emphasis added] of Latinas/os from completing the course requirements for a certificate, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree” (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2014, p. 4).

Sadly, remediation has become [...] higher education’s “Bridge to Nowhere.” This broken remedial bridge is travelled by some 1.7 million beginning students each year, most of whom will not reach their destination — graduation. It is estimated that states and students spent more than \$3 billion on remedial courses last year with very little student success to show for it. (Complete College America, 2012, p. 2).

As evidenced in the previous policy excerpts, the connections of the crisis discourse took a patterned form when blaming developmental education. It was nearly uniform across the documents that authors began by blaming developmental education for an economic crisis for the state government. The economic harm, allegedly caused by developmental education, was displayed in three forms. First, developmental education was labeled as expensive with few outcomes (low graduation rates). Second, authors noted that students need college credentials to be part of the upper workforce (Carroll, 2011; Holzer, 2015). Third, developmental education was implicated in causing statewide

economic harm by worsening the economic competitiveness of the states by limiting the number of graduates and therefore the number of highly skilled workers who pay taxes on those higher incomes. In sum, the narrative path began with a crisis of economic harm caused by developmental education. Such harm was described as a slippery slope where developmental education was wasting money (low graduation rates), leaving students without degrees to earn more income in better jobs, and leaving less tax dollars to be recuperated.

One initial critique can be identified with the summative nature of the assumptions embedded in the crisis discourse. First, the crisis discourse stretches the main goal of developmental education far past its intended outcomes, helping students pass their first credit-bearing course and thus providing access to higher education (Parker et al., 2014). The discursive effect is that developmental education is framed as *directly and solely responsible for labor market outcomes of students*. Instead of including students' academic proficiency, their socio-economic status, the quality of the students' K-12 education, or the funding for the postsecondary institutions, the dominant theme was to singularly blame developmental education. Some of the policy document authors critiqued this assumption and its underlying premises (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012, September; Parker, 2007); however, this was less prominent in the documents, both in the number of times the idea was engaged and in the effort spent analyzing this perspective. One example from the data itself relates the critique:

In sum, these studies reveal at best a mixed bag of results, suggesting that students in need of remediation do no better (and at times slightly worse) when compared to similar students who are not referred to remediation.... Regardless, the findings from

these studies as a whole suggest that educators and policymakers should proceed with caution when implementing remedial placements and in evaluating their impacts.

(Kurlaender & Howell, 2012, p. 8)

### **Students as Encumbrances**

One of this study's research questions asked: What are the central subject positions expressed for developmental students? Within the data, the following dominant ideas were expressed.

- a. Students are described as a group of poor racial minorities who:
  - i. come from weak K-12 educational systems,
  - ii. may be adult or first-generation students,
  - iii. and have a weak understanding of high-stakes testing.

Operating within the crisis discourse, the three driving ideas of economic harm mentioned previously contribute to generating the subject position of *encumbrance*, which authors took up to identify developmental students. Students took blame for burdening society with the cost of their education not once but twice. Some policy authors critiqued this narrative noting that policymakers had responded multiple times throughout history to the idea of paying twice for the same education of students (Parker, 2007; Russell, 2008). However, some policy document authors argued that these students were unable to learn. Others said that the unteachable were already lost and thus not worth the effort of supporting, for example: "When higher education's Bridge to nowhere is finally closed for good, it is true that some may still be lost. But nearly all of these students disappear today" (Complete College America, 2012, p. 3). Here, for these policy document authors, the students encumber society so profoundly that state governments

cannot afford to fiscally sustain developmental education, its closure justified by the *inevitable failure* of the students it serves.

The racist and classist implications of this claim are apparent when one reflects on the fact that many of these students come from families from low socio-economic status, as well as the fact that many are racial minorities (Parker et al., 2014). Moreover, as Attewell et al. (2006) demonstrated in their research on the National Educational Longitudinal Study data:

The common-sense impression that remedial coursework is taken by students with poor high school preparation or very weak academic skills is inaccurate. Our analyses show that many college students with limited academic skills do not take remedial coursework while substantial numbers of students with strong high school backgrounds nevertheless take remedial courses. Nor is remedial coursework the preserve of the economically dis-advantaged: Large proportions of students who graduated from suburban and rural high schools take remedial coursework in college, as do many students from high SES families. These empirical findings contrast with public debates that portray remediation as a preserve of a small group of academic incompetents who have no hope of success in higher education. (p. 914)

However, this kind of insight from the academic literature was not present in the policy documents. While assuredly not all policy document authors drew on discourses that produce a fatalistic view of developmental students' capabilities, the dominant discourses did lend themselves to the viewpoint that developmental education was a waste of students' time and money and implicitly that the students were to blame. Another example from the data follows:



There are significant costs in terms of both dollars and human potential. In addition to the cost to the State via base-aid, students also bear a great cost. Considering that roughly 50 percent of students who enroll in developmental/remedial courses leave college before they complete a program of study, these numbers are especially distressing. (Duncan-Poitier, 2012, p. 10)

Summarily, the reality produced by dominant discourses supported blaming students and subsequently shaped the encumbrance subject position for students in developmental education.

Another way the discourse of crisis generated the encumbrance subject position was by linking developmental education to low workforce outcomes (i.e., low wages and tax bases). As evidence for this line of argument, authors often cited the low income of developmental students following degree attainment. Authors said this negatively impacted businesses, businesses that could not afford to train workers who lacked “technically advanced” skills (Carroll, 2011, p. 6). The call to remain economically competitive, both nationally and at the state level, pervaded as a dominant theme across the data, solidifying the purported pejorative impact of developmental education on the economy through harming the education of the workforce. The following experts illustrate this.

“Without skilled workers able to move into the labor force, existing business and industry in the state cannot thrive, and Connecticut will be unable to draw in new employers” (Carroll, 2011, p. 6).

“Texas community colleges have a high dropout rate, which limits economic opportunity for Texans and poses a major barrier to building and sustaining a skilled workforce” (Helmcamp, 2010, p. 1).

“Significantly increasing the number of students who earn postsecondary degrees and credentials is essential to the economic and social fabric of the United States” (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012, p. 26).

This assumption that developmental students harm the economy by decreasing graduation rates was shaped by the crisis discourse, which produces the subject position of encumbrance. Said differently, the discourse produced the idea that while students do not want to cause harm, they are still barriers to statewide economic success.

Connecting to another study of policy discourse that examined educational gaps between minorities and Whites, Bertrand et al. (2015) concluded that deficit discourse employs “the strategy of asserting that those most negatively impacted by inequality *cause* inequality” (p. 19). Bertrand et al. showed that a deficit discourse shapes only negative positions for students, where their “inferior” cultural (e.g. Black parenting) is blamed for low academic preparedness. This blaming of minority cultures was not explicitly articulated in the policy document sample used in this dissertation, mostly because the documents remained relatively silent on detailed descriptions of students. However, the encumbered subject position here operates through the same discursive path that Bertrand et al., (2015) found. It blames students most impacted by K-12 educational inequality (developmental students) for that inequality (e.g., low motivation).

Looking at how the crisis discourse operated on a larger scale, it allowed authors to craft their policy brief to an audience by exaggerating the impact of developmental education on a reified economy. Of course, the economy is often the focus of policymakers. But the framing of the economy in the crisis discourse may present troublesome stances. To understand this, illuminating the role of the audience in discourse is key. Van Dijk (2008) asserted,

... Virtually all levels and dimensions of text and talk may have obligatory, optional or preferential access for different participants, for example, as a function of their institutional or social power. Or rather, such power and dominance may be enacted, confirmed and reproduced by such differential patterns of access to various forms of discourse in different social situations. Thus, having access to the speech act of a command presupposes as well as enacts and confirms the social power of the speaker. (p. 69)

The insight van Dijk offers in this quote is that both the authors of policy documents and the policymakers have access to the text and subsequently the discourses. This fact dialectically generates their social power. Indeed, it is discernable that authors drew upon this crisis discourse to intentionally craft their documents to speak about the economy and garner attention from policymakers. Shaping a document to an audience is of course reasonable. But the crisis discourse enabled authors to focus on more than the direct cost of funding developmental programs. The crisis discourse allowed authors to predict lost potential future earnings and subsequent taxes from jobs that don't currently exist. The discursive effect of authors imagining lost economic potential was a magnification of the economic argument.

Other analyses of policy discourses have revealed that discourses of economics “tend [...] to give more prominence to universities’ participation in the economy than to their role in society” (Suspitsyna, 2012, p. 50). In this way, the crisis discourse I identified and the discourse of economics that Suspitsyna (2012) identified serve the same function; they construct the possibility that higher education should serve the economy first before it serves students.

In sum, the crisis discourse identified in this investigation contributes to producing a reality where developmental students are likely to be seen as encumbering society with the cost of their education and the cost of their imagined lost earnings. Furthermore, by failing to describe these students in detail (many are racial minorities), the crisis discourse enabled authors to re-inscribe the historic blame on students, some of whom are the least privileged members of society, a re-inscription of historic structural and systemic racism and classism (Fox, 1999; Soliday, 2002).

### **History of Crises**

Speaking on discourse and ideology, van Dijk (2009) stated: “only those structures of discourse should be called ideological that can be shown to be expressions of the underlying socio-cognitive representations (such as mental models and attitudes) that are controlled by the structures of the ideology of a group” (p. 394). I contended that the current discourse of crisis identified in this investigation that is shaping realities for developmental education is not new. Rather, it draws on ideological structures and histories of literacy crises clearly documented by other scholars.

Current policy documents continue an ideological theme of workforce competitiveness of the late 1990s: “legislators argue that we must reform our educational

system to produce a more competitive workforce” (Soliday, 2002, p. 105). This framing of community colleges as serving the needs of the business sector and the economy has a complicated link to the creation of community colleges, a history that is vigorously debated by higher education historians (Pedersen, 2007). While some see the initial creation of community colleges as an intended stratification of society,<sup>18</sup> others argue that community colleges were built for more localized and complex incentives that included providing access to higher education in communities that had no postsecondary institutions (Pederson, 2007). The particular origin of their inception aside, by failing to acknowledge community colleges’ historic relationship to the stratification of society (Soliday, 2002), and drawing upon a dominant discourse of crisis, the discourses taken up in the policy documents contributed to shaping subject positions for students both as encumbrances or as maligned. These subject positions offer no space for differently-prepared students to struggle with or be dismissed by postsecondary institutions.

This can be understood as one notes the connections between the current crisis discourse and the history of student “illiteracy.” To review, the supposed impetus for Harvard’s first composition course was a literacy crisis (Soliday, 2002). Then there were the national “literacy crises” of the 1960s and 1970s (Fox, 1999; Soliday, 2002) and the “literacy crisis” that CUNY faced in the 1990s (Horner & Lu, 1999). Soliday (2002) showed that in the 1990s “by blaming remedial programs for a constellation of educational woes, from budget crises to low retention rates, to falling standards, the critics of remediation practiced an effective politics of agency. They attributed problems that public higher education faced throughout the decade *to students* [emphasis added]”

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<sup>18</sup> Some argue that community colleges were made to move minorities to 2-year colleges away from whites at 4-year colleges (Pederson, 2007).

(p. 106). Soliday (2002) showed that in doing so, the attribution of blame focused and limited the solutions towards “fixing” students instead of alternate options like changing faculty pedagogy, institutional or state policy, or state funding of the academy.

The politics of agency is crucial. By assigning blame through agency, dominant discourses still construct the boundaries of problems and solutions, overshadowing alternate ideas. Simply, if students are to blame, the logical solutions will be bound to fixing students. If instead, institutional, systemic, and discursive practices are to blame, solutions can be found in multiple locations. Assuredly, the historic nature of *crises* in student literacy in relation to higher education, and the political debates that pervaded these crises over time, were absent in the data when dominant discourses were taken up.

Overall, the absence of historical lenses in the policy documents created a vacuum, a silence, into which these authors re-inscribed the historic *literacy crises* (Soliday, 2002). The crisis discourse effectively positioned authors to argue that students’ illiteracy, their lack of college readiness, is the fault of the students, a “fact” authors still see as burdening society. Because policy document authors did not trace the history of literacy crises in their literature reviews, this silence magnified the encumbrance subject position for students.

However, the encumbrance subject position was not the only subject position for students found in my analysis. While the enduring discourses of crises,<sup>19</sup> found by other scholars, shaped the subject position of students as encumbrances to society, what I show

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<sup>19</sup> While the work of Fox (1999) and Soliday (2002) is not explicitly founded on theories of discourse, their works shows that there is a history to the framing of students as detriments or encumbrances to institutions, students whose remediation was costly and bothersome. Thus, I work from the premise that the discourse of crisis is shifting to remain functional despite clear national political pressure not to tokenize nor blame the underprivileged in institutional systems.

in the next section is that this contemporary version of the crisis discourse shifted the conversation, avoiding, in part, the explicit racist and classist assertions that deficient students are the main problem with outcomes and access. The subsequent result is that the contemporary version of the crisis discourse allowed authors to illustrate students as harmed by developmental education.

On the whole, one subsequent contribution of these findings falls under documenting how the current crisis discourse has evolved from the literacy crises of the 1990s (Soliday, 2002). In the 1990s students were blamed through the “politics of agency” (Soliday, 2002) for poor outcomes; one could say that developmental students were seen as “encumbering” postsecondary institutions. The discourse of crisis still shapes subject positions for students in pejorative ways today. However, what my analysis reveals is that it does this through more politically palatable language. The crisis discourse now constructs the possibility of blaming postsecondary institutions by focusing far more on seeing students as *maligned*.

### **Maligned Students**

While detailed descriptions of students, on the whole, were relatively sparse in the data, the authors most common description of students was as poor racial minorities who needed developmental education because of low college preparedness. Examples of these descriptions include:

“Rates are higher for some groups, particularly black and Hispanic students, and remedial course-taking is generally higher at two-year, open-access institutions, where many students begin their postsecondary studies” (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012, p. 2).

“Only 3 percent of African-American and 10 percent of Hispanic high school graduates met the college-readiness benchmarks” (M. L. Collins, 2009, p. 3).

“More than 40 percent of all New York’s high school students graduate under-prepared for college. This situation is even more problematic among students of color, as less than 15 percent of African Americans and Hispanics graduate college-ready” (Duncan-Poitier, 2012, pp. 6-7).

“If you’re African American, Hispanic, or a low-income student, you’re more likely to be headed toward the remediation dead end” (Complete College America 2012, p. 6).

Within these quotes, two ideas arose: a concern was expressed asking if minority students can access higher education; conversely, clear blame was shifted onto developmental education for inhibiting access, maligning students. The repeated low outcomes for students in developmental education, meaning low persistence and graduation rates, were cited as evidence by almost all authors that developmental education is maligning students. Some less prominent themes enabled authors to claim the harm is also focused on the poor (Price & Roberts, 2009).

In fact, the crisis discourse intensified the *maligned* student subject position for students by allowing authors to see students’ lack of education as a negative impact on students’ *future* economic potential and students’ subsequent fiscal contribution to society. Here, numerous authors argued that there was a cost in not training youth with a given postsecondary credential that is, that the education could not produce income to



pay taxes back to society (Holzer, 2015), meaning students encumber society because they are maligned. The cause of this, according to the authors, is a broken developmental education system. The summative idea: the dominant discourses constructed a singular option for developmental education as maligning students and preventing access.

This shift in students' subject position to being maligned by developmental education came with many implications. Because the dominant discourse of crisis supported authors to focus on workforce issues, economic competitiveness, and the economic health of the nation and states, one solution authors posited was to move students towards vocational tracks for economic outcomes. Simply, the idea was to help the students make more money for the economy; thus the economic benefit for the state, not the students' success, was the discursive effect of taking up the crisis discourse and focusing on the economic impact of developmental education. The vocational solution to fixing developmental education was not framed as helping students. When authors drew upon the crisis discourse, they suggested vocational tracking to support *state economic growth*, privileging the economy over the students.

In reflection, if systems of higher education segregate students into vocational tracks, through a segregated developmental education system<sup>20</sup>, then those educational systems determine the careers of those students e.g., welders or carpenters instead of lawyers, doctors, scientists. To be clear, I don't prejudge welding or carpentry as inferior nor intend to discuss a purely binary option in a highly divergent set of educational pathways. However, I do agree with scholars who argue that having diverse demographic representation in our political landscape (e.g., women), and in our scientific communities

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<sup>20</sup> Policy trends indicate that more and more states are eliminating developmental education from 4-four-year postsecondary institutions (Parker et al., 2014).

(e.g., racial minorities) is both healthy for society (Allan, 2008) and morally imperative (Parker et al., 2014). Thus, tracking students into vocational careers in segregated systems based on developmental status is unacceptable. However, authors who took up the dominant discourse of crisis focused on getting students jobs in order to save a stalled economy through vocational tracking instead of setting up students to achieve their academic and intellectual potential. An example from the data follows.

The logic of CTE and work-based learning allows us to create high-quality pathways into the labor market for young people - especially for those not ready to go straight into higher education - through which they could gain recognized education credentials as well as strong early work experience. For many young people, especially the disadvantaged, who now have trouble gaining both, this could be a very welcome development. (Holzer, 2015, p. 5)

Other authors rebuked this idea, not for the tracking of the students, but again for the economic health of the state.

The legislative changes aim to allow students to choose a *vocational pathway* [emphasis added] instead of a four-year college degree. Given that those who have some college experience but no associate degree will maintain lower wages and higher unemployment rates than those with associate and bachelor's degrees, this move by the Texas legislature does not support the economic well-being of the state population. (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2014, p. 11)

The dominance of the theme concerning the health of the economy, generated by the crisis discourse, returns here on either subject position for students. The vocational path, whether condoned or condemned, was almost always discussed in its relationship to the

welfare of the economy and the state. An alternate discourse existed in some documents which retained the focus of the negative impact of developmental education on students instead of the economy. However, this alternate theme was less prominent than the dominant economic model. Most importantly, it still portrayed students solely as maligned by developmental education. In sum, the dominant discourses constructed the possibility of developmental education as exclusively harming students and almost always harming state economies. This aligns with other scholars' findings on discourse and economics in higher education. As summarized before, Suspitsyna's (2012) found, in her analysis of the dominance of economic discourses, that evaluations of postsecondary institutions valued more highly college's contributions to state economies than college's educational contributions to students.

In review, scholars have questioned the value of labor market outcomes and career goals as measures of success for education (Morley, 2001). It is also important to note that scholars have responded forcefully, through the National Association of Developmental Education (NADE) (Executive Board, 2011), to the exact line of vocational tracking suggested by the Complete College America (2012) policy document. In spite of this, NADE had almost no voice in these policy documents; only a single document written by NADE administrators met the sampling criteria, and no NADE publications were cited in the other 38 policy documents.

### **Crisis Discourse Summary**

Perhaps the most pivotal issue arising from the dominance of the crisis discourse, when taken up so readily by authors, is that a pejorative framing of educational crises is likely to eclipse the possibility of empowered subject positions for students. While the

encumbrance subject position allows authors to still blame students, similarly to the politics of agency in the 1990s (Soliday, 2002), its twin, the maligned subject position, also allows space for only pejorative aspects of students' personal, social, and cultural lives. Simultaneously, students are seen as maligned by developmental education. This then aligns with findings of other scholars who have analyzed discourses shaping higher education, like Gildersleeve and Hernandez (2012). They studied undocumented immigrant students' access to higher education through in-state resident tuition policies ISRT (as compared to developmental education), and found that ISRT policies utilize multitudes of "dehumanizing language" (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012, p. 11). Further they found:

The legitimacy discourse effectively makes The Alien Student a position of contestation, yet removes the actual student from engaging within that contestation. Rather, The Alien Student is reduced to an object of ISRT policy. As objects of policy, undocumented students become the battlefield in which state and federal discourse collide. (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012, p. 13)

Thus, as is evident, multiple discourses operating within the higher education policy landscape construct pejorative subject positions for students from racial minorities.

In contrast to pejorative subject positions, the ideas covered earlier in the literature review chapter showed pedagogical methods that empower and value historically marginalized students (Horner & Lu, 1999), as well as the idea that diverse students enrich a college's intellectual character (Archer, 2007; Turner, Garcia, Nora, & Rendon, 1996). These empowered ideas were almost completely absent from the policy document authors' discussions. This lack of an empowered subject position is magnified

in light of other evidence. Iverson (2008) has shown, using policy discourse analysis, that college diversity action plans have discourses that shape empowered subject positions for diverse students, subject positions as entrepreneurs and change agents. Thus, there exist empirical evidence of discourses and subject positions that warrant the value of diverse students. For the current data, however, the implication of exclusive pejorative student subject positions is that policymakers cannot frame students as a resource themselves for overcoming the “crisis.” In addition, by focusing the dominant discussion on the state economy, considering the impact of developmental English education on differently-prepared students was also nearly absent. In this discursive landscape, whether policymakers or scholars are supportive of or critical of developmental education, the dominant framing is not conducive for them to see students as change agents for improving developmental education or access to the academy. Simply, the solutions offered by English scholars (Horner & Lu, 1999), who defined empowered subject positions for students, were absent from the data either because policy document authors were unaware of these scholarly contributions or because these ideas were intentionally left out. In either case, the crisis discourse eclipsed empowered subject positions for students, leaving the value of the students silent.

In contrast to this, one set of policy document authors did explicitly argue to “include the communities of the students. Latina/o students have access to a community cultural wealth of capitals that the education system routinely fails to acknowledge and utilize as possible avenues to improve pedagogical approaches” (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2014, p. 12). While this one example exists in the data, it was the sole document to support the idea and thus was obscured by the dominant discourses.

Finally, it was perhaps predictable that the crisis discourse enabled ways for authors to reduce the political nature of blaming students because academia is currently more aware of systems of historic stratification and segregation (Rothenberg, 2010; Tatum, 1997). In the 1990s, scholars critiqued *literary crises* for deficit focused explanations that exclusively blamed students for the subpar outcomes, instead of also considering institutional and state roles (Fox, 1999; Horner & Lu, 1999; Soliday, 2002). Today, in order to shift from the politically charged nature of blaming students, the current policy authors needed a new target to continue the discourse of crisis in a more politically palatable manner. Developmental education has, consciously or unconsciously, become that new target.

## CHAPTER 5: ACCOUNTABILITY

Once the policy document authors established as fact that developmental education harms students, the state, and the workforce, it logically followed that these “abject failures” required a review of accountability for their origins. The accountability discourse was dominant in the data, and it was taken up more readily because of the interdiscursive interplay between it and the crisis discourse. Again, interdiscursivity is the notion that multiple discourses are “articulated together” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2004, p. 73). The crisis discourse eclipsed the interrogation of truths concerning specific failures of developmental education. The dominant idea from the crisis discourse was that developmental students encumbered taxpayers and that those students were maligned by developmental education. The accountability and crisis discourses produced realities interdiscursively by relying on the “truth” of a legitimate crisis. In other words, the perception of an educational crisis allowed for the concept of accountability to be employed. In this chapter, I review how the focus of blame on developmental education served to generate the prosaic subject position of faculty followed by a review of access to postsecondary institutions in relation to the discourses. Finally, I offer a rival explanation to the harmful theory of developmental education in a proposed theory of access.

Accountability agendas that impact education have been thoroughly researched by higher education scholars (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011). Consequently, their ideological history can be traced, and they can theoretically be defined as ideological discourse, or discourse that serves particular political, social or cultural viewpoints (van Dijk, 2009). Thinking broadly, accountability agendas reach far past developmental education through

standards in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and its revised system of the Common Core (Addison, 2015; Ruecker et al., 2015). In higher education, the accountability agenda can be witnessed in projects like the Measuring-Up scorecards that quantify states' progress towards degree attainment and the Indiana Project on Academic Success (IPAS) (Zumeta & Kinne, 2011).

In their recent text *The State of Developmental Education*, Parker et al. (2014) contextualized accountability in developmental education:

As the nation grapples with accountability and academic standards in the quest for global competitiveness, developmental education and its continued role in higher education has focused prominently in recent national debates. The questions raised around developmental education have shifted from what it takes to successfully serve students to what it takes to make developmental programs most efficient. This is a subtle yet significant difference in approach as the former focuses on student success and the latter on success of the institutions. The discourse<sup>21</sup> around developmental education is thus reduced to one of function and utility, leading to an alarming disconnect between policy and practice where the question of how to move students through developmental education quickly and in the most cost-effective way is one whose answers are often fervently desired by higher education leaders and policymakers. (p. 154)

Based on this analysis, I contend that the national accountability ideologies that are shaping education serve to support the accountability discourse identified in these data. The accountability discourse can be understood as a bridge connecting the problems

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<sup>21</sup> To be clear, Parker et al. (2014) are not using “discourse” from a poststructuralist perspective; they employ the term to showcase their perspective on national discussions.



of developmental education (sustained by discourses of crisis) to the solutions (constructed by the discourses of standardization, efficacy, and policy fiat); see figure 4. By understanding the discourses drawn upon to identify specific problems for developmental education, the places where accountability is called for can be illuminated. Furthermore, by revealing to whom developmental education must be accountable, the context for solutions can be understood.

### **Prosaic Faculty**

As in the previous chapter, here I note again the pertinent research questions and findings from my analysis related to this subject position. What are the central subject positions expressed for developmental students and developmental faculty? My analysis of the data revealed the following ideas about faculty.

#### Faculty

- a. Dichotomous discussion emerged between the arguments:
  - i. faculty generally use poor pedagogies and therefore need to be retrained;
  - ii. versus, faculty involvement is important, and they should re-write curricula.

Interestingly, the authors discussed faculty subject positions less often than all other topics from the research questions. Consequently, in order to show how the faculty position of prosaic (outdated) was produced, I will first demonstrate how the authors often *personified* curricula and pedagogy resulting in indirectly discussing faculty.

*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines personification as “a manner of speech endowing nonhuman objects, abstractions, or creatures with life and human characteristics” (Preminger & Brogan, 1993, p. 20). This said, I follow Knapp (1985) by seeing personification as doing more than metaphorically sharing

characteristics; I see it as functioning to efface the borders of “literal and figurative agency” (p. 2). Put simply, personification gives inanimate objects *human agency*. Thus, as authors of policy documents *endow* pedagogy with the figurative agency to act, they syntactically remove the faculty who instruct the course.

This linguistic turn to a personified pedagogy, a teaching practice that acts with no teacher, was pervasive in the policy documents. Below are examples from the data where authors personified teaching practices without indicating the agents, the teachers. A careful review of each passage shows the subjects of the sentences are “traditional education,” “traditional approaches,” “programs,” and “remedial pedagogy.” These subjects “take” the verbs, enacting outcomes for students as if they walked around the classroom, removing the agency of the faculty (and also the agency of the students).

“Traditional developmental education delivery is unlikely to produce the dramatic improvements in outcomes necessary to put many students on solid pathways to postsecondary credentials” (M. L. Collins, 2009, p. 11).

“ ‘[D]oing more of the same is not enough.’ Given that traditional approaches to sequencing and instruction have not provided sufficient likelihood of student success, the LAO’s proposal could not succeed without new approaches to developmental education” (Perry, Bahr, Rosin, & Woodward, 2010, p. 64).

Some higher education results are disappointing... nearly 60 percent of community college students enter with weak academic preparation and require skill

remediation, known as “developmental education” (Bailey and Cho, 2012). Most of these programs seem ineffective or even harmful. (Holzer, 2015, p. 3)

“A remedial pedagogy is decontextualized and does not emphasize student interactions. Remedial pedagogy results in disengaged students” (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2014, p. 6)

One example from the data directly implicates faculty: “Unfortunately, most college professors teach as they were taught and, as a result, they spend the majority of their instructional time lecturing” (Boylan & Saxon, 2009, p. 7). Here, the same outcome as before is generated. Faculty are construed as prosaic, unable to innovate new, efficacious pedagogies.

Thinking further on personified pedagogy, an idea from discourse studies is helpful. Scholars have hypothesized that discourses operate on three linguistic levels: “pragmatics (interactions amongst speakers and hearers); semantics (meaning, structure of lexicon); and syntax (the internal organization of sentences)” (Chilton & Schaffner, 2011, p. 312). Because it is obvious that faculty write curricula and choose their own pedagogy at the collegiate level, the removal of the agent implicates the prosaic, outdated faculty without identifying the faculty directly. Thus, personified pedagogy can be conceptualized as acting through the level of syntax to affect the semantic level. The outcome is that the policy document authors discuss faculty without directly naming them. Through uptake of the accountability discourse, authors obscure their critique through personification; faculty are relegated to a subject position as prosaic. Assuredly, a dominant solution that emerged from the documents was a need to retrain faculty, a

topic discussed in detail in the Habituated Faculty section of Chapter 6: Efficacy and Standardization.

At length, a profound example of explicit personified blame suggested “the very structure of remediation is engineered for failure” (Complete College America, 2012, p. 2). Here, failure is not a matter of being prosaic or unimaginative; instead, failure is supposedly the *intended outcome* that faculty desire. While this demonization of faculty was rare, it represents the extreme of the accountability discourse that fundamentally creates the conditions for authors to shift blame from students (who encumber society) towards faculty and developmental education programs that perform poorly. Developmental education is the new target. Under these dominant discourses, prosaic teachers are to blame for graduation attainment gaps between developmental and non-developmental students.

Finally, this shift in blame functions to forward the overall narrative path of the greater discourses (see Figure 4). By switching the blame from students who encumber society to prosaic faculty that malign students with ineffective developmental education, this accountability discourse switched the role of public accountability for education. The crisis discourse constructed subject positions mostly for students. State policymakers are clearly accountable *to* students and parents. However, authors who employed this accountability discourse shifted the blame for low student outcomes (e.g., graduation rates) to hidden agents (faculty) who are accountable *to* state governments and policymakers. Thus, instead of blaming students, the discourse of accountability served to construct realities where those to blame are answerable to traditional forms of power –

state policymakers. Teachers can be held accountable more easily than students because state postsecondary institutions answer *to* policymakers.

Again, the discourses were taken up, in part, by personifying targets of blame with no agency or voice, i.e., curricula and pedagogy. Thus, it was again easier for authors to blame personified curricula and pedagogy (developmental education) than faculty who might push back. In this sense, the personified pedagogy shows how the discourse of accountability is utilized in this specific content. Finally, this shift of blame from students to faculty created space for both the discourse of crisis to continue and for the discourse of accountability to arise. It follows that if the “real problem” is with institutions and faculty, then policymakers are more likely to hold those institutions, curricula, pedagogy, and faculty responsible. Here, accountability discourses construct the possibilities whereby policymakers can become adjudicators and innovators, subject positions for policy/policymakers that are discussed in Chapter 7: Policy Fiat.

### **Blaming K-12, Assessment, Teachers, and Developmental Programs**

This section delineates a second analysis of the research question: How are the problems of developmental English education defined in relevant policy documents? Multiple dominant and intermediate themes within the accountability discourse create the conditions of possibility to blame the purported failures of developmental education on numerous agents. Intermediate themes were identified in a majority in the data where dominance was not so pervasive that it eclipsed all other narratives. An intermediate theme arose in the data blaming high schools and the wider K-12 education systems for poor student outcomes. The ideas serve to support the argument that “weak” K-12 preparation was to blame for the need for developmental education, that high schools

often offered poor college counseling, and that high schools or states often had no defined metrics for college readiness. Examples of these ideas follow:

“Low performing high schools tend to under-prepare their students for postsecondary education” (*Policy brief: Building pathways to transfer: community colleges that break the chain of failure for students of color*, 2012, p. 1).

...Some students arrive at college having attended elementary and secondary schools of low quality or with weak academic rigor. Students who attend poor-quality schools may not receive the necessary grounding in core subjects such as English and math to engage successfully in college-level work. (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012, September, p. 4)

Notably, [college] outreach counselors were often mentioned as the *only* real college counseling that students at the low performing [high] schools received. Without the outreach counselors from community colleges, students would have had little idea of either how or why to apply to college. (*Policy brief: Building pathways to transfer: community colleges that break the chain of failure for students of color*, 2012, p. 3)

There are many reasons why students need developmental coursework, but a primary cause is the misalignment between high school and college expectations. Our K-12 system was never designed to prepare all students for college, and

students may meet all high school requirements and be admitted to college, only to later discover that they cannot pass placement tests for entry into college level courses. (Russell, 2008, p. 1)

“At the K-12 level, too few states have clearly defined college-readiness standards” (M. L. Collins, 2009, p. 4).

Furthermore, accountability discourses allowed authors to frame responsibility for failures of developmental education on issues of assessment. Here explanations included the idea that the processes of assessment and subsequent placement in developmental education are poorly organized and that assessments are also misused.

“The current assessment intake process is confusing, inconsistent and poorly communicated, and it could be contributing to higher than necessary remediation placement” (Fulton, Gianneschi, & DeMaria, 2014, p. 24).

“While it might be easy to conclude from the recent studies that institutions are using flawed assessments, the researchers assert that it is not the instruments that are the problem, but how they are being used” (Fulton, 2012, p. 12).

Thus, the dominance of the accountability discourse created conditions where authors articulated some of the major ideas from academic scholarship, discussed previously in the literature review, the ideas of faulting assessment practices and showing students as maligned by K-12 systems.

Returning to Figure 4, the accountability discourse was employed by authors to react to the idea of a “legitimate” crisis. The narrative path follows: since the economy

needs exigent help, and more students need to graduate from college urgently, policymakers need to hold colleges accountable to solve the barriers to student graduation. The accountability discourse also simultaneously contributed to students' subject positions as encumbrances. Authors argued that students who don't take high school or assessment testing seriously harm themselves. "Some [students] deliberately choose easy courses, especially in their senior year, and miss opportunities for rigorous classes that better prepare them for college" (Russell, 2008, p. 1).

Moving to the core of accountability, the authors of policy documents often cited research showing that few students passed their developmental sequences and even fewer graduated from college.

"Having survived the remediation gauntlet, not even a quarter of remedial community college students ultimately complete college-level English and math courses — and little more than a third of remedial students at four-year schools do the same" (Complete College America, 2012, p. 3).

"...Nationally, less than 25 percent of community college students enrolled in developmental education complete a degree or certificate in eight years, compared to almost 40 percent of students who do not take developmental courses" (Carroll, 2011, p. 5).

"Currently, the majority of students who place into remediation do not complete their developmental education course sequences and never enroll in entry-level college courses" (Fulton et al., 2014, p. 32).



In sum, authors drew upon the accountability discourse, blaming low graduation rates on a dysfunctional developmental education system that fails to support student success. These low graduation rates were the most dominant problem defined by authors who employed the dominant discourses operating in these policy documents.

Through the combination of under-supported K-12 systems, poor diagnostic and placement assessments, and the adverse viewpoint of traditional developmental education, the accountability discourse contributed to shaping the prosaic subject position of faculty (both high school teachers and college professors). The ideas related can be summarize like this: if students are poorly prepared for college, misplaced in coursework, don't pass developmental sequences, and suffer in credit-bearing classrooms, faculty ossified in tradition who built the developmental programs are to blame. Furthermore, because developmental education faculty were not directly mentioned (the accountability discourse produces the context in which authors may personify pedagogy), this critique was hidden in a seemingly "objective" discussions of the efficacy of developmental education programs. Even when authors showed support for teaching faculty, seeking to empower them, developmental education was still seen as a broken system. Thus, an irony was created in empowering faculty who implicitly were being blamed for poorly designed curricula and poor application of pedagogy.

A final consequence of defining the problems of developmental education in these ways was that developmental education was described by policy document authors as failing its responsibility to serve taxpayers. Students were again relegated to a maligned status, harmed by the very educational systems that fail to promote their success. Taxpayers were described as burdened with inefficient developmental systems, systems

that pay twice for the same education with few results. One policy document author critiqued this theme in their reading of both the scholarly literature and other policy documents noting:

Opponents of remediation also contend that remedial education courses cause taxpayers to pay twice for skills that should have been developed in high school. In sum, college remediation is touted as the culprit of wasting students' time and squandering taxpayer money. (Parker, 2007, p. 2)

Parker here insightfully unpacked the implications of the accountability discourse without naming it. The implication supported by the accountability discourse is that educating poor, disadvantaged, minorities who are unlikely to graduate is a waste of taxpayers' money.

### **Access**

When authors employed the accountability discourse, as identified in my analysis, their framing of access to postsecondary education was not dominated by a singular theme or idea. Instead, a competing tension arose across the uptake of discourses. First some authors framed developmental education as an obstacle itself for access, a barrier harming students ability to graduate from college or earn money afterwards. No authors contended that developmental English was a barrier to access based on an argument against "standard" English. An alternate theme proposed stating that removing developmental education would harm access opportunities. Alternate themes, similar to intermediate themes, were found in a plurality, not a majority of documents; however, alternate themes were defined when multiple competing ideas worked across the data with no clear dominant position. One author writing an Association for Scholars of

Higher Education policy brief (ASHE) noted: “recent policy decisions to end remedial education signify a much too simplified resolution to a multifaceted problem” (Parker, 2007, p. 1) because through her scholarship she has found that past policy decisions to remove developmental education from the California State University (CSU) system and the City University of New York (CUNY) system harmed access opportunities for students. The call to eliminate developmental education was only an intermediate level theme, meaning only a small majority of authors supported it. However, even when dominant discourses construct the solution to reduce the time of developmental education through the acceleration of curricula (evidenced later), the least prepared students could bear the greatest risk of harm. Simply, I assert with other scholars (Grubb & Babriner, 2013) that students who are differently-prepared, meaning they have not mastered academic English, who are subsequently placed in accelerated developmental classrooms, with compressed curricula, may not be reasonably expected to flourish.

Again, returning to the discussion of placement in the literature review, the issue of underplacement has been well documented (Scott-Clayton et al., 2014), and it has been shown that underplacing students into developmental education can harm their persistence (Bailey et al., 2010). However, as I argued before, scholars have not conducted extensive, quantitative causal research on the impact of developmental education on students with severe academic deficiencies because of the research design difficulties in creating experimental and control groups, a point on research design that authors of a single policy document noted in their review (Kurlaender & Howell, 2012, September). This said, some authors noted the disagreement among scholars concerning efficacy research related to developmental education. As an example from the data:

...State efforts to improve developmental education outcomes are hindered by conflicting evidence about the overall effectiveness of developmental education programs. Some research findings suggest a positive impact for students who take developmental education (Bettinger & Long 2005). Others suggest that students who never enroll in developmental education do just as well as those who complete their developmental education sequence (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey 2006). Another study suggests that developmental education may decrease a student's chances of success (Martorell & McFarlin 2007). (M. L. Collins, 2009, June, p. 2)

Here, by applying the research methods, one can identify perhaps the most salient and powerful (in the Foucauldian sense) silence in the policy discourses. No consistent conceptual or technical descriptions of academic preparedness were given, nor were detailed examples given of how underpreparedness would manifest. Preparedness for college was not theorized. This absence of a theory of preparedness left no space to conceptualize language acuity and no space to see students who speak alternate dialects of English, other than those traditionally privileged by the academy, as differently-prepared.

The productive power of the dominant discourses shaped possibilities where only strict binary models of preparedness (unprepared versus ready) were discussed. So, within the dominant discourses, either a student knew English well or they did not, period. Yet, scholars have importantly theorized that language acuity is only one resource or type of capital that has value in educational contexts (Yosso, 2005). Yosso's model of

Community Cultural Wealth has six components, including linguistic wealth. She carefully explains that she meant to advance Bourdieu's work because:

“his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of ‘culture’ are judged in comparison to this ‘norm’ ”. (p.76)

Crucial then to her model is the idea, embedded in critical race theory, that “communities of color are places with multiple strengths” (p.82). She sees that Bourdieu's work is valuable, but that it easily recreates a binary of standard and non-standard. Thus, two points need to be considered. First, I have utilized “differently-prepared” across the manuscript to allow for multiple strengths to be recognized in historically underrepresented cultures, like familial and social capital (Yosso, 2005). Second, I too recognize that the binary is not a White/black duality around language but that many communities offer valuable forms of linguistic capital that are merely different (neither worse nor better) than the norms of the academy. Finally, I also take the point from Clegg (2011) about Yosso's work:

The sociological, historically contingent, hypothesis that newer social groups entering the field tend to bring with them new perspectives that can usefully challenge old dogma is a good reason for valuing community cultural capital and voices of newer groups, without assuming in advance that newer knowledge claims will necessarily be valid. (p.100)

Clegg (2011) contributes and builds on Yosso (2005), by saying that while groups outside privileged norms offer value through having diverse community cultural capital, that

exact value outside privileged norms is not automatically better or more credible than dominant ideological norms.

Returning to the data from the policy documents, again there were no conceptualizations of language ability or notions of language privilege. Indeed, concepts like the idea of literacy were unmentioned. In other words, while a few authors did identify that college-readiness was not adequately conceptualized or defined, the dominant recommendation was that states should simply adopt a common definition, thus re-inscribing the notion of a “standard” English that has been thoroughly critiqued by composition and English scholars (Fox, 1999). Through the uptake of the accountability discourse, the idea that policymakers could just create such an arbitrary definition was never interrogated by policy documents authors; rather, the authors suggested defining preparedness through fiat. The absence of knowledge, the lack of a theory of preparedness for college, affected power by *producing silence* in the policy landscape.

Accordingly, it became clearer that the accountability discourse created the conditions of possibility for authors to focus the blame for the failures of developmental education onto faculty and postsecondary institutions without a clear definition of the challenge that developmental education directly works to address. The problems with developmental education are not synonymous with the challenges developmental education work to solve. In brief, when a developmental English faculty member tries to help a student move from a 6<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade writing level to a college writing level in 15 or 30 weeks, it hardly seems logical to blame that faculty member for not being able to remediate four to six years of absent educational progress in such a compressed amount of time. Because the prosaic professor was the most common subject position for faculty,

and because students' academic readiness was seldom interrogated, blaming personified pedagogy (developmental education, faculty) was the expedient focus. This said, institutional reliance on "standard" English may prevent differently-prepared students from succeeding in classrooms where faculty adhere to a standard model (Horner & Lu, 1999). However, I would argue that this issue could pertain to any course with written assignments or a professor speaking English, not exclusively developmental English education courses.

Nevertheless, not all students have large gaps in their academic preparedness. In fact, perhaps the least debated topic in the scholarly literature (Bailey et al., 2015; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014) is that the predominantly utilized placement tests (ACCUPLACER and COMPASS tests) don't accurately separate students into groups of underprepared students versus prepared students for college. I argue one step further. Scholars (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010) explained that for experimental research designs to hold internal validity, the experimental variable "must represent a factor or variable that differs in amount or intensity across levels of the independent variables" (p. 109). Because developmental students are not randomly assigned to create experimental groups with comparison control groups, the correlation of developmental education to graduation or labor market outcomes is inherently muddled, if not *invalid*, because of the myriad other extraneous variables that exist between the treatment and the outcomes, i.e., literally every course taken after developmental education before graduation. Correlation was misconstrued as causation by policy document authors through productive power. Authors constructed solutions based on *producing* the invalid conclusion that developmental education does not work by referencing biased samples of scholarly work

that discredited the efficacy of developmental education (instead of showing the scholarly contention in the field). I discuss this biased sampling at the end of the chapter.

I also argue further that the placement tests also fail because there is “inadequate preoperational explication of [the] construct” (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p. 115). In other words, the assessments lack construct validity; they don’t accurately measure the inferences the tests draw between academic underpreparedness and college readiness because college preparedness is not merely a measure of academic capacity. As so many scholars have noted, preparedness for college would include other factors like the student’s economic capacity to pay for school and the motivation of the students, as well as numerous factors of the institutions themselves (Kuh et al., 2007). This kind of detailed analysis was rarely present in the policy documents. In spite of this, the goal of supporting graduation rates is not identical to the goal of supporting access to higher education. Developmental education is a point of access to higher education and can be held to account for its role in access; developmental programs were designed to improve access. But access must be understood holistically through ecological models of campus’ cultures. The colleges on the whole, as well as the societies that support these postsecondary institutions, are accountable to graduation rates, not just developmental education.

### **Harmful Theories of Developmental Education versus Theories of Access**

The dominance of the accountability discourse produced conditions that facilitate the likelihood that policy writers operated from misinformed understandings of scholarly research, conflating correlation and causation, ultimately offering a harmful theory of development education. This theory asserted that that developmental education primarily



harms students by lowering their chance to graduate, a theory shown as invalid by Attewell et al. (2006). Here, I offer a plausible rival explanation to the harmful theory of developmental education supported by the realities produced by the accountability discourses identified in this investigation. The students' *underpreparedness* for college, the possible absence of four to six years of educational attainment, not developmental coursework, is what scholars and researchers are actually measuring when statistically correlating developmental status with graduation rates and labor market outcomes. Further, I assert that low graduate rates are the outcome of the interplay of students' academic underpreparedness (marked by the label of developmental education) with institutional, societal, and policy barriers. Attewell et al. (2006) showcased this when controlling for difference between developmental and non-developmental students and found that the underpreparedness was the causal factor that affected graduation rates, not developmental education. The concept of underpreparedness warrants further explication, a point I return to soon.

Due to the implications of this claim about underpreparedness, further discussion is necessary. A sketch of data helps explain. The national graduation rate was recently identified at 59% (*Almanac of Higher Education 2014*, 2014), and the graduation rates of developmental students has alternately been estimated at only 28% (Bailey et al., 2015). Attewell et al.'s (2006) work showed that this estimate is inaccurate (despite its continued citation); they show that there is no difference in graduation rates for students who only take one developmental course; the effect occurs for those students who take more than a single developmental course, which is 14% of community college students.

Research by Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2002) has given the impression that taking multiple remedial courses is itself a serious barrier to graduation from two-year college[s]. When we controlled for students' academic preparation and abilities leaving high school for a two-year college, we found that taking multiple remedial coursework in a two-year college does not in itself disadvantage these students. Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum did not distinguish between the effects of having a weak high school academic preparation and the effects of taking multiple remedial courses in college. Our analyses suggest that the problem is the former, not the latter. Taking several remedial courses (characterized as being "bogged down" in remedial coursework) *does not reduce chances of graduation* [emphasis added]. (Attewell et al., 2006, p. 908)

This insight aside, the policy document authors operated under the assumption that this near 30% gap was "true." So, the fundamental question to ask is what explains this near 30% gap in success between the *most underprepared developmental students* and the general student population? In other words, what is the theory, the explanatory process, that accounts for the *causal differences* in these numbers. Again, the dominant accountability discourse in these policy documents allowed authors to argue a harmful theory of developmental education. They argued that developmental education wastes time in one or two courses, bores students, stigmatizes them with the label of remediation, and wastes precious financial aid. However, it is likely that most college graduates can think of at least two courses they took that bored them, that felt like a waste of time, and with which they found little relevance. If this harmful theory of developmental education was credible, would it be logical to assume that most English

majors that had to take statistics and most Engineering majors that had to study a unit of poetry would fail to graduate (hyperbole intended)? However, the dominance of the harmful theory of developmental education was dominant. Claiming that faculty who are teaching students to read, write, or practice math (even if they fail to use the most efficacious pedagogy) directly cause a national 30% gap in developmental students' graduation rates is exaggerated. Instead, an explanation can be framed by understanding that the academic *underpreparedness* of students is the ultimate cause of this graduation gap. To be clear, I do not argue that the students are underprepared in their own language to communicate. I simply argue that these students are underprepared, meaning they may lack mastery of academic forms of English, the privileged English of the academy, or they may be underprepared on non-linguistic factors, like motivation, financial security, etc. Further still, I argue that for many of the students, their preparedness is not the key issue, but rather the institution's readiness/preparedness to educate the students (inadequate components of postsecondary institutions inside and outside developmental classrooms). Developmental education is simply the label for underpreparedness, an underpreparedness that is not yet well theorized. Finally, other factors like economic access, cultural inclusion, as well as both the students' and the institutions' commitment to one another (Tinto, 1987), and the level of student engagement (Kuh et al., 2007) all impact student success and graduation rates.

Attewell et al.'s (2006) accounted and controlled for academic preparedness through logistic regression (not simple correlation). Their data show that taking developmental English coursework in two-year postsecondary institutions *improves graduation rates*:

For remedial courses in reading, we found that two-year college students who passed remedial reading were more likely to graduate than were academically and otherwise equivalent students who did not take remedial reading. The positive effect was a 11% higher graduation rate in the conventional logistic model, and 8% in the propensity matched model. This positive influence of remediation was also evident for remedial writing in two-year colleges. Students who passed remedial writing courses were 13% more likely to graduate in both models. (Attewell et al., 2006, p. 912)

To be clear, this positive effect of developmental coursework is not found for four-year postsecondary institutions; there developmental reading has a negative effect on graduation rates (Attewell et al., 2006). Yet the point remains, the impact of taking developmental education is not homogenous across underpreparedness needs (needing one or more courses) nor institutional types i.e., two-year, four-year, and selective four-year institutions<sup>22</sup>.

Furthermore, in contrast to the harmful theory of developmental education enabled by accountability discourses, I argue again that underpreparedness is the reality for which developmental education is only a *discursive label*. As Horner and Lu (1999) have argued, developmental education is a construct. As Bailey et al. (2013) have argued, academic preparedness comes in a continuum, a scale over which current assessments

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<sup>22</sup> “For example, at two-year colleges, 42% of students took no remediation, 44% took between one and three courses, and only 14% enrolled in more than three remedial courses. At nonselective four-year colleges, 69% took no remediation, 26% enrolled in between one and three courses, and 5% took more than three. At selective four-year colleges, 2% of NELS:88 students took more than three remedial courses, and at highly selective four-year institutions almost no one attempted multiple remediation courses” (Attewell et al., p.898).

can only find two values, developmental or not (a false binary). Principally, a 30% graduation gap would be a catastrophic consequence for taking a set of courses in an academic program. Instead, I offer that a comprehensive theory of access needs to be developed. I choose *access* instead of *preparedness* so that the focus is not exclusively on students while acknowledging that student preparedness would be part of the theory of access. In this proposed theory of access, a student who was designated as *underprepared* (whether it be with language acuity or other factors) in the current context could not necessarily be easily taught all they need to learn in a few fifteen week courses. This underpreparedness would be understood as potentially following a student across their entire college career, not a single semester or year. Thinking back to the 30% graduation gap, I argue that this underpreparedness more accurately describes what is occurring *to* developmental students. Developmental education is not *the* major source of harm; students' lack of college preparedness (as defined by the dominant norms of the academy) is the more influential source. Therefore, it is crucial to note here that any proposed theory of access must be incredibly careful to not re-inscribe a deficit model (Fox, 1999) of illiteracy that blames students solely for their lack of success. The percent of blame students should bear would clearly be debated by scholars. However, a more comprehensive theory of access would account for the interplay of other factors beyond student preparedness, including institutional preparedness and the level of state support.

Examples of these factors would include the economic support for students K-12 schools as well as postsecondary institutions, the level of education of students' parents, and the readiness of the institutions to teach differently-prepared students. All the factors under the proposed theory of access would understood as contributing to access and

success in higher education. Again, it is crucial to note that Attewell et al. (2006) found “causal factors that do reduce one's chances of graduating include low family SES, poor high school preparation, and being Black, *but not college remediation per se* [emphasis added]” (p. 905). What Attewell et al. (2006) does not account for is the fiscal support of the K-12 systems, the history of segregated educational systems (Parker et al., 2014), or the problems of privileged, standard English in placement tests (Fox, 1999). These factors become critical under the influence of the poststructuralist lens of policy discourse analysis and show how Attewell et al.'s (2006) scholarship can be built upon.

In sum, a key finding from the data analysis is that the label of developmental education, constructed by prevailing discourses, can be more accurately understood as a label of underpreparedness or being differently-prepared for college. Yes, students who are misplaced into developmental education maybe harmed by developmental education (Baliey et al., 2010); they may have wasted their time and money. However, for those students who are underprepared, relative to the dominant norms of the academy, developmental education is simply not powerful enough of a “treatment;” the classes alone cannot solve the “problem.” Finally, if improving access is a discussion of equity not equality, then providing these students what they need to succeed should be the focus, not lamenting that the equal access to financial aid may be wasted by students at the cost to taxpayers. Attewell et al. (2006) make this point in their scholarship:

The NELS:88 shows that 28% of remedial students in two-year colleges graduate within 8.5 years (com-pared to 43% of nonremedial students) and that 52% of remedial students in four-year colleges finish bachelor's degrees (compared to 78% of students without remedial coursework). Looked at another way, 50% of African

American bachelor program graduates and 34% of Hispanic bachelor program graduates in the NELS:88 survey graduated after taking remedial coursework. If those students were deemed unsuited for college and denied entry to four-year institutions, a large proportion of the minority graduates in the high school class of 1992 would never have received degrees. (p. 915)

A core finding of my study is that the lack of a comprehensive theory of access, that includes accountability for student preparedness, institutional preparedness, and state level support, left policy document authors with only developmental education and developmental educators to blame. The discourse created the possibility for a singular reality instead of a multi-modal description of accountability. The interdiscursive interplay of the crisis and accountability discourses then served the role of allowing authors to oversimplify this extraordinarily complex problem. While there was an intermediate level discourse in the data supporting the idea that the K-12 educational systems had failed these students, only a single author directly linked this underpreparedness to developmental education outcomes (Parker, 2007).

In another vein of reasoning, it is not unreasonable for policymakers to require accountability for billions of tax dollars being spent. But to fix a problem, one must know its causes so that solutions can be built. In the larger narrative path outlined in Figure 4, accountability discourses created the conditions for an “natural” target, developmental education, shifting accountability from the historical attack on students as encumbrances to society to prosaic pedagogy, teachers unable to get results. Finally, the role of the accountability discourse allowed authors to produce *the truth* that developmental education is a broken system that maligns students. However, as shown below, the

citations from the policy document authors display highly biased samples of scholarly knowledge about the problems within developmental education.

A major issue I assert against the discourses taken up by policy document authors relates to the data noted earlier about authors' use of references. Three authors included no citations, and 15 relied solely on secondary sources, other policy documents or "gray literature" for their evidence. Furthermore, there was an absence of peer-reviewed journals devoted solely to the study and practice of developmental education or English scholarship (e.g., the *Journal of Developmental Education* or *College Composition and Communication*). This silence of specific strands of developmental education or English scholarship discursively engages "symbolic power, that is, in terms of preferential access to, or control over, public discourse" (van Dijk, 2008, p. 14). Accordingly, dominant accountability discourses interdiscursively produced conditions of possibility for authors to strengthen and refine the arguments embedded in the crisis discourse and subsequently shift the narrative path towards solutions by leaving out dissonant voices.

Following the calls by some higher education scholars (St. John, 2011) for "regional curricular alignment...easier transfer between two and four year colleges... [and] assessment of factors associated with retention, at the state, system, and campus levels" (p. 220), the accountability discourse enabled authors to call for centralized oversight of developmental education through state appropriated commissions or boards. This in turn led to the discourses of standardization and efficacy, where performance metrics, data, and curricula were called on to be homogenized. It also simultaneously led to the discourse of policy fiat, where policymakers held colleges accountable. But most



directly, as a response to accountability, the discursive path called for efficacious practices to fix a pernicious developmental education system.

## CHAPTER 6: EFFICACY AND STANDARDIZATION

### Overview

“Truth is an *effect* of power/knowledge operating through discourse” (Allan, 2008, p. 24). Through analysis of the policy documents, after authors drew upon crisis and accountability discourses, placing accountability for low graduation rates squarely on developmental education by producing truths about developmental education as “broken”, authors turned next to solutions. Therefore, in this section, I answer the research question: how are policy solutions for developmental English education defined in relevant policy documents? The statements below summarize the dominant ideas expressed in the policy documents.

The following solutions were proposed to or for policy in the data.

- a. To fix developmental education, policy must:
  - i. use the power of command;
  - ii. be based on data-driven decisions;
  - iii. make colleges accountable by:
    1. utilizing performance-based funding,
    2. and by defining performance based metrics;
  - iv. mandate curricular changes with focuses on:
    1. acceleration and limited course sequences or,
    2. the removal of all DE curricula;
  - v. and fix placement and assessment by:
    1. requiring multiple measures,
    2. and standardizing college readiness.

Here, the discourses of efficacy and standardization are conceptualized as functioning dialectically and interdiscursively to support the solutions of practice (see Appendix C). Stemming first from accountability discourses that allowed authors to articulate harmful theories of developmental education, the search for efficacious practices that can replace or modify developmental education followed. More specifically, authors argued for better data systems and higher quality research to determine which practices led to the most effective outcomes for developmental students. It is important to separate two strands of efficacy discussion. Policy document authors as a whole did not critically analyze the efficacy of developmental education, what they saw as the “*problem*”. As stated, the strongly dominant theme was to produce the idea that developmental education was ineffective. In contrast to this, the policy document authors did analyze the efficacy of *solutions* to fix developmental education, operating under harmful theory of developmental education that they themselves produced. Evidence of the efficacy and standardization discourses was recurrent. For example:

“Quality data on what works for students who place into developmental education are limited. Many disseminated “best practices” are based on weak evidence.

Much more strategic and targeted research is needed to identify strategies that can have a broad and powerful impact” (Achieving the Dream, 2012, p. 6).

“State support also is needed for measuring the impact of interventions, a critical step in identifying practices and strategies that produce positive results” (M. L. Collins, 2009, p. 11).

“Essential to tracking student success at community colleges is the availability of solid data and commonly defined metrics that go beyond measuring the traditional (and limited) enrollment and graduation rates that these colleges report to the federal government” (Horn & Radwin, 2012, p. IX).

Subsequently, the discourses of efficacy and standardization created the conditions of possibility whereby authors could discern which practices function. However, principles of research design (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010), not policymakers, define what knowledge about efficacy is valid. To understand why the discourses of efficacy and standardization were so critical to the narrative path, one must first remember the most dominant solutions proposed.

The dominant discourses taken up in the documents provided a platform for the authors’ arguments for particular solutions including: common curricula with accelerated classes through modular or co-requisite coursework, delineated pedagogies, and regulated developmental education programs, all often scaled to statewide consistency. In addition, dominant discourses created space for fixing the educational pipeline from high school to college, for example by requiring aligned K-16 curricula and standardized college readiness criteria as well as increased ancillary supports like tutoring, counseling, and learning communities. The authors argued for standardized assessment with emphasis on multiple measures. Fulton (2012) argued “it may be time for a Manhattan Project to redesign assessment and placement practices across the nation” (p. 2). In sum, the goal to create standard accelerated curricula and pedagogies was the most dominant theme, the standardization being a key element.

Bailey and Alfonso (2005), a secondary source of data, illuminate how the dominant efficacy discourse interdiscursively interacted with the standardization discourse as the scholars articulated four principles that impede research on persistence and completion: “overemphasis on the four-year college....lack of data on institutional policies....methodological problems....[and] inadequate dissemination and discussion” (pp. 7-8). Two major foci emerged from these ideas in the policy documents: scalability and the capriciousness of developmental programs. The dominant standardization discourse reinforced the argument for scalable practices that could be used state-wide. An example from the data illustrates: “To ensure wide-scale developmental education reform, positive outcomes from specific reform efforts must be scaled and adapted to different contexts in ways that generate significant long-term impacts” (Heldenfels et al., 2012, p. 10).

As a result, the discourses created the conditions from which authors implicitly took a position where qualitative studies were seen as limited in their usefulness because (some) discrete research designs cannot necessarily be scaled up or expanded to large populations, for example the longitudinal study of developmental and composition English courses in CUNY (Sternglass, 1997). Furthermore, the wide variance of heterogeneous developmental education policies and practices (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010), as noted in the literature review section on developmental program structures, makes scholarly’ determinations of efficacy difficult. Without standardization, it becomes nearly impossible to formulate homogenous samples of developmental programs from which statistical inferences about the population can be made, a basic principle of

quantitative research design (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). This understanding from a secondary data source is demonstrated below:

Most practices that are studied involve discrete programs; some students are in these programs, and others are not. Studies of the effectiveness of the programs generally consist of a comparison between those two groups of students, but these types of comparisons often do not provide enough information to make a valid judgement. As long as there is some non-random process by which students enroll or are chosen for such a program, it may be that any differences between participants and non-participants result from the selection process, not from the program itself. (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005, p. 8)

Thus, policy document authors took up the standardization discourse under the auspices of scientific validity. Policy document authors argued to standardize developmental education for the sake of positivist, statistical efficacy research. Two major ideas from the Bailey and Alfonso (2005) quote above work in tandem here to produce the need for standardization. First, and more importantly, the non-random placement of students in any support program, be it a learning community, tutoring, or developmental course, confounds the validity of causal research because there is always a chance that what statistical tests infer after the program or coursework may be the result of placement, not the program or coursework itself. This extraneous variance lowers the internal validity of the research design (J. McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Thus, second is the idea that efficacy is difficult to judge in non-standardized populations. From a quantitative, positivist perspective, the clearest way to deal with this threat to internal validity is to standardize all assessment and placement practices across a large population so that

inferential statistical analyses can produce accurate and reliable results. Again, the crucial finding is that this basic premise of social science research could be seen in the data analyzed for this investigation: “Systematizing assessment and placement policies so that standards are consistent from college to college can increase the chances that colleges identify and appropriately place students who need academic intervention” (M. L. Collins, 2009, June, p. 8).

Indeed, the policy document authors suggested and implied standardizing assessment, curricula, pedagogy, data collection, college readiness criteria, and academic policies, all for the sake of the study of efficacy, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the data:

Until postsecondary leaders agree on a basic definition of remediation, how to identify students who need remediation, how to apply those criteria in a consistent way, which metrics to gauge performance and so on, comparisons are weak indicators at best. (Fulton et al., 2014, April, p. 4)

In this sense, the standardization discourse undergirded the desire to use inferential statistical tools. In other words, the standardization discourse was employed to shape validity in the efficacy discourse, a point I return to soon.

### **Habituated Faculty**

To understand how the discourses of efficacy and standardization created the possibilities for the habituated subject position of faculty, this analysis must turn towards the policy solutions authors proposed in the data. Central to the study was the research question: how are policy solutions for developmental English education defined in

relevant policy documents? Dominant discourses support the following ideas concerning solutions of practice.

#### Solutions of Practice

- a. To fix developmental education, institutions must:
  - i. align K-12 and college curricula;
  - ii. improve assessment and placement through myriad changes;
  - iii. redesign developmental curricula following principles of acceleration, utilizing modular coursework as well as contextualized curricula;
  - iv. re/train faculty;
  - v. increase ancillary supports;
  - vi. and improve data collection and use.

The consequence of the dialectical interaction between efficacy discourses and standardization discourses led to the creation of the *habitual* subject position for faculty. Because faculty were seldom directly discussed as agents in reforming developmental education, and because the accountability discourses successfully allowed authors to shift blame to faculty through the prosaic subject position by personifying pedagogy and curricula, the discourses of efficacy and standardization effectively positioned authors to argue for mandatory habitual practices decreed to the faculty. Here again, the ideas to accelerate curricula, to standardize it, and to mandate modular coursework all contribute to the act of commanding what faculty must do without directly mentioning them.

Indeed, the removal of faculty from teaching altogether is quite literally created with the advent of modular technology and pedagogies, as seen in the data:



“Modularization is a technique that breaks down a course into key components that allow students to spend most of their time studying only the course content needed to address skill deficits. Modularized course content is often *delivered via enhanced technology* [emphasis added] in self-paced programs...” (Asmussen & Horn, 2014, p. 7).

From this perspective, the faculty member of developmental education is almost not needed; they can manage a course, tutor students when needed, but the students learn primarily through instruction from superior teachers, instructors who have been recorded through video and audio that provide lectures through computer software, software that grades the students’ work.

This modularized coursework is a rising strand in developmental mathematics (Bailey et al., 2015), but application to English is obviously more difficult because credible computerized grading of essays, not just discrete grammar or mechanics skills, is clearly harder to generate. Moreover, these modular computerized programs theoretically create a “perfectly” standardized pedagogy and curricula that, through panoptic observation (Foucault, 1995), can be both studied and regulated. If students were not progressing as desired, faculty could be notified by administrators to intervene. Habituated teaching practice could be automated by technology. Reflecting analytically, this is a good example of why generalized policies for all developmental education may not account for differences in teaching math versus teaching English.

Flipped classroom models that engage acceleration through software are not directly intended to harm students. I make no such claim. Besides, summative research in the classroom shows computers have positive or null effects on student learning

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 97-100). But standardization of curricula and pedagogy are, as scholars have shown, intended to “shift [...] the locus of control from education away from teachers and local public school systems and towards testing companies and other private entities that use assessment primarily as a tool of accountability and control” (Addison, 2015, p. para 2). Scholars have been critiquing the private profit of educational software companies and their impact on teacher agency since their inception (Warren & Bell, 2014). Here further reflection is needed. A key point made earlier was that scholars have clearly identified that the automated assessment and placement tools for developmental education -ACCUPLACER and COMPASS-, created by third-party private companies, don’t accurately place students (Bailey et al., 2015; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). Because of the clarity of this major issue, caution may be warranted before extending similarly automated software to pedagogy. However, no direct caution for using technology was articulated in the data, and only a very minor alternate theme allowed authors to argue for teacher autonomy in curricular creation.

Finally, an alternate theme in the data noted that fixing developmental education was indispensable to maintaining and expanding access. However, the solution to accelerate courses assumes that academically underprepared students can simply teach themselves with self-paced computer software. Assuredly, accelerating curricula through modular coursework was the paramount idea articulated as a solution across all data. I’d concur that it is perhaps likely that the most prepared developmental students may be able to utilize an accelerated computer software learning system. However, highly underprepared students may not be able to teach themselves years of high school English or math. Even further, because some developmental students are adult students who may

be unfamiliar with computer technology, and because so some developmental students are of low enough socio-economic status that they may not own a personal computer<sup>23</sup>, the modularized curricula may unintentionally harm some students.

In contrast, it is critical to note that there was a relatively silent alternate theme arguing that the habituation of faculty through the standardization of curricula and pedagogy was a move in the wrong direction. “Remedial education instructors should be full-time faculty who develop and assess their own pedagogies that respond to diverse social and academic experiences students bring with them to the classroom” (Parker, 2007, p. 6). This was an alternate theme articulated by very few (less than 5 of 28) of the primary document authors. Moreover, while the direct call here to “respond to diverse” students was embodied in the dominant discourses through the use of contextualized curricula, the policy document authors as a whole made no direct mention of postcolonial, critical (Greenfield, 2011), or poststructuralist (Horner & Lu, 1999) pedagogies. In this sense then, the authors argued that faculty should attend to the cultural and social contexts of students without acknowledging that some English faculty have devoted their entire careers to developing pedagogies that work to precisely accomplish that task. The efficacy and standardization discourses operated to produce a dominant narrative where only pedagogies tested in the social sciences, not the humanities, were construed as valid. Instead, the idea of retraining faculty was sometimes justified by noting that faculty may be culturally and socially removed from their students. An example from the data follows: “Professional forums also function as a venue to heighten

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<sup>23</sup> While only anecdotal, as a developmental professor, I can attest that in each class I have taught, one student has tried to submit work that was hand written because the student didn’t own a personal laptop or could not use the school’s computer labs when they were open. This remains a simple example of how standardized instruction cannot account for localized challenges in postsecondary institutions.

awareness and knowledge of issues specific to an institution's first-generation student population, offering new insight for faculty whose backgrounds may not reflect those of their students" (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012, p. 10).

Taken together, the efficacy and standardization discourses, along with the prosaic subject position for faculty generated by the crisis and accountability discourses, produced the possibility for authors to construct a clear narrative path. Authors argued: *because faculty are seldom able to produce efficacious developmental education programs, the need for social scientists to measure the efficacy of pedagogical practices is natural and justified*. Said differently, the idea articulated in the data was if traditional models of developmental education don't work because of prosaic faculty, others, meaning scientists and policymakers, must fix the coursework. Consequently, one insight of this analysis is that the greater arguments between positivist and non-positivist educational research methodologies impact these specific discourses of efficacy and standardization in relationship to developmental education. With efficacious practices identified by social scientists, policy document authors followed the narrative path that faculty should be required to utilize these "best" practices; the analysis shows a dominant theme that faculty's pedagogical practices should be habituated.

Continuing to trace the idea of methodologies in social science research in education, it is important to note that "education research is widely constructed as the scientific investigation of the causes of 'effective' teaching. Discussion of values and philosophical problems is condemned as descent into 'ideology' " (Clark, 2005, p. 289). The supposed neutrality of efficacy research then lends itself to a seemingly non-political view where effective practices can be identified. But this is a mirage that has often been

pointed out concerning social science research; inquiry is innately political (Allan, 2009; Guba, 1984; Kuhn, 2012; St. Pierre, 2006).

While paradigmatic differences have been studied between academic disciplines (S. K. Gardner, 2013), it is not a new idea that inquiry is generative of meaning not merely descriptive of it (Guba, 1990). I argue that the larger debate in education concerning research methodologies interdiscursively relates to the discourses that shape developmental English education. Remembering that longitudinal studies (Sternglass, 1997) and other forms of historical and poststructural (Horner & Lu, 1999) inquiry are labeled as qualitative research, qualitative education scholars themselves have had to respond to discursive effects of those arguing for more *qualitative rigor* in their research (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

We situate our response to the call for standards of evidence in qualitative research in a pervasive discourse that describes education research in general as historically and presently broken and in need of repair. Whether the situation is as dreary as it is made out to be is beside the point; today's fix is to make educational research *scientific* [emphasis added], and the federal government has taken the lead in this project by mandating scientific method into law. (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007, p. 25)

Leaving aside the role of government until the discourse of policy fiat can be explored, scholars (Freeman et al., 2007; St. Pierre, 2006) have shown that national discourses pertaining to educational research have prescribed *science* as the cure for poor quality research, and by science, quantitative, statistical analyses are implied as valid and rigorous, not qualitative methodologies (Freeman et al., 2007). However, many scholars

have called for a vastly more diverse epistemic training of educational researchers beyond positivist viewpoints (Niaz, 2004; Pallas, 2001; Paul & Marfo, 2001).

Despite this debate, the efficacy discourses that emerged in the data of these policy documents mirror the larger national discourse of utilizing science to fix broken educational systems. It is no wonder then that authors who took up the standardization and efficacy discourses regulated developmental faculty (English faculty are non-scientists) to habituated subject positions. There, the developmental faculty can be told to teach standardized curricula with standardized pedagogy all for the sake of efficacy research that will determine new “best practices.” Furthermore, if social scientists using qualitative research designs must justify the legitimacy of their own methods as they pertain to educational research, in order to efface dominant national discourses about validity in educational research, then scholars of the humanities (English professors) may face greater odds speaking against the same themes of “scientific” dominance. The dominant discourses of efficacy and standardization effected their productive power by relying on these larger dominant national discourses calling for quantitative, standardized scientific research.

Finally, as shown before, English scholars and experts in composition do not unilaterally support nor critique developmental English education (Grubb & Babriner, 2013; Horner & Lu, 1999). The absence of these voices left both pejorative views of developmental education as well as supportive views of developmental education’s role silent. Hence, multiple opportunities for improving developmental English education were eclipsed by the silence of English scholars’ perspectives in the dominant discourses identified in the policy documents.

To review, the discourse of accountability contributed to shaping conditions where blame for low student graduation rates was placed on developmental education and developmental educators, in effect produced the prosaic subject position for faculty. In turn, the efficacy discourse was often taken up, which includes the embedded logic to produce *valid* results through scientific inquiry. Authors employed the efficacy discourse when searching for programs and practices to best improve developmental student outcomes. In order to design “valid” causal research, using inferential statistics, authors argued for the standardization of developmental programs, pedagogy, policies, and data collection, all through mandate. This dialectical loop between efficacy and standardization discourses interdiscursively solidified in authors’ calls for curricular and pedagogical habituation. Said differently, following the narrative of this interdiscursive pathway, the implication was that faculty should be homogenized in order to study them scientifically. Furthermore, researchers seeking effective practices through scientifically “valid,” homogenized experimental groups, must seek the capacity to command the standardization of all these aspects of developmental education, assessment, pedagogy, policies, transfer, and data collection. Thus, the need for traditional forms of power in policy fiat were discursively produced, justified through constructing the *truth* of the harmful theory of developmental education and through the standardization discourse that served to validate efficacy research. For the narrative path, the desire to find solutions to a seemingly dire crisis, devoid of accountability, warranted the hierarchical power to command state postsecondary institutions through policy fiat.

## CHAPTER 7: POLICY FIAT

In this chapter on the discourse of policy fiat, I first review how I identified subject positions of policy and policymakers without their explicit articulation in the research questions. I then discuss the dominant ideas and subject positions produced by the discourse of policy fiat.

The summative research question of this study was: how do the discourses of these policy documents contribute to shaping realities for developmental students in higher education? The following dominant ideas were articulated in the policy documents concerning discourse shaping content.

### Discourse Shaping Content

- a. The economic competitiveness of the state or country is at stake; poor DE student outcomes worsen the issue. DE students need to enter the job markets, and vocational paths are the most appropriate.
- b. Actions taken already include:
  - i. third party institutions are working on the problems;
  - ii. greater calls for action on accountability are taking place, despite some mixed evidence on the efficacy of DE;
  - iii. and, policies are a tool for reform;
    1. that are state driven;
    2. that standardize testing, curricula, and pedagogy;
    3. and are important for access.



Stated before, I explained that “discourse shaping” codes in phases two and phase three of analysis specifically referred to policies’ and policymakers’ agency, the ideological assumptions of authors, and the author’s research methodological preferences. In designing this project, I did not first think to code specifically for the agency of policy, to see policy itself as personified, as “doing” things, as inhabiting subject positions. However, there was a clear theme within the documents concerning the impact and agency of policy when authors made explicit recommendations for how policy could actively reform developmental education. For example:

“State policy has an important *role to play* [emphasis added] in guiding and supporting improvements in the developmental education efforts of community colleges” (Price & Roberts, 2009, p. 5).

“...[use] policy supports *that facilitate* [emphasis added] the implementation of new models and encourage the spread of successful practices (Achieving the Dream, 2012, p. 4).

This personified policy contrasts highly with authors who used agents when discussing policy changes. “For the best results, state policymakers and the higher education community, as well as intermediary agencies, must exchange thoughts, ideas, and concerns about educational challenges confronting their states” (Turk et al., 2015, p. 13). The common thread for all three examples from the data is that policies function or act. Thus, they inhabited subject positions. Because policy discourse analysis has roots in emergent methodological designs (Allan, 2009), the intentional shift in my analysis to focus on subject positions of policy and policymakers was warranted, despite it not being

a research question focus. In fact, one of the key findings of the study is that personified policy took on the mask of neutrality by avoiding mention of faculty and students.

Competing themes emerged for personified policy and policymakers. Competing themes were defined when two or more themes engaged opposing views but where one theme was dominant. Policy solutions were given both as prescriptive commands and as cooperative tools supporting reform but allowing for innovation. Both ideas of how policy should work were embedded in the data. The more dominant discourse taken up by authors was that of policy fiat. By this, I mean that using policy to mandate, instead of guide or support, was the prevailing functionality ascribed to policy. Thus, policy fiat is not just the outcome of the discursive narrative path; it was a discourse itself, operating to construct the limits and possibilities for how policy should shape responses to the issues. The idea to accelerate or increase pressure on policy agendas to reform developmental education was a dominant principle articulated in the data.

“...Require institutions with developmental education programs to use technology, to the greatest extent practicabl[y] consistent with best practices, to provide developmental education to students effectively and efficiently” (Heldenfels et al., 2012, p. 9).

Because of the benefits stemming from clearly defined and consistently applied assessment and placement policies, Achieving the Dream states are part of a national trend toward providing more *prescriptive guidance* [emphasis added] to institutions on these important issues. (M. L. Collins, 2009, p. 9)

“Systemic realignment of this magnitude will take effort and require the buy-in of Connecticut policy leaders and the Executive Branch” (Carroll, 2011, p. 10)

“Articulate the intake process *in policy* [emphasis added], regularly evaluate institutional practices, and build institutional accountability systems around the effective implementation of these policies and practices” (Fulton, 2012, p. 9)

In order to create an effective and “aggressive policy” agenda (Achieving the Dream, 2012, p. 3), many authors argued for the creation of centralized oversight committees or coordinating boards, often at the state level. “The Coordinating Board will develop a statewide standard of practice that efficiently employs the most effective indicators for use by institutions to enhance the decision-making process in the assessment and placement of students” (Heldenfels et al., 2012, p. 12). In fact, third party organizations have created a specific policy framework, in the Developmental Education Initiative, that delineates steps for how to create urgent policy agendas (Achieving the Dream, 2012). Similarly, scholars of higher education have delineated steps for “evaluability assessments” designed to review retention programs in community colleges that can inform “college decision makers” about the efficacy of given practices (McKinney, 2010). Yet, even sometimes within the same document, an alternate cooperative theme pushed back against prescriptive policy arguing that a functional policy agenda “requires significant engagement from state policymakers, leaders, and higher education stakeholders” (Achieving the Dream, 2012, p. 4). In between these two poles was a call to communicate the need for reforming developmental education and to use policy platforms to produce urgency for that reform.

The dominant discourses produced the possibilities for authors to employ policy fiat to argue that policy should mandate: the use of multiple measures for placement, the standardization of college readiness, and fixing curricula with acceleration or the removal of developmental classes. Examples from the data follow.

Additionally, state policy can require that institutions use multiple measures to inform placement decisions and apply common standards for successful completion of developmental work (generally within the first year of postsecondary studies). These steps will help ensure that internal state data are comparable, transparent and useful. States can also hold institutions accountable for improving their assessment intake processes to provide clear and timely information to students on the stakes involved with placement testing. (Fulton et al., 2014, April, p. 5)

“Require systems or institutions to articulate the content required for enrollment in credit-bearing courses” (Fulton, 2012, p. 8)

Embedded in these commands, the authors utilizing policy fiat personified policy, producing the subject position of *innovator* for policy by interdiscursively leveraging the discourses of accountability, efficacy and standardization. The idea expressed was, if prosaic faculty cannot invent new changes to curricula, then innovative policymakers and policies can mandate change towards standardized practices. Many authors noted that some policy recommendations made in the last decade have already served as direct mandates to alter program structures and curricula.

“Students are not permitted to enroll in more than one semester of developmental courses” (Turk et al., 2015, p. 4).

“To focus their work, they were given a set of guiding principles to consider as they redesigned the curriculum: The new curriculum will be modular.

Developmental students will be able to complete the curriculum in an academic year” (Bracco et al., 2015, p. 5).

“Across the nation, several states have adopted and implemented institutional and *state mandates* [emphasis added] to reduce the need for developmental education” (Southern Education Foundation, 2013, p. 3).

The acknowledgment that many states have already begun a prescriptive policy agenda for developmental education reform in and of itself does not equate to approval of this aggressive policy agenda and is not innately ideological. In fact, one alternate theme did emerge in the documents showing policy itself as a barrier to change. “The prescriptive nature of the change made faculty and staff buy-in more difficult to achieve” (Turk et al., 2015, p. 5). As a consequence, the discourse of policy fiat shaped a second subject position for policymakers, one as *adjudicators*.

Within the realities produced by the discourse of policy fiat, authors reasoned if policymakers should not directly prescribe changes to developmental education curricula, they still have the formal hierarchical power to use commands to incentivize change by adjudicating the performance of postsecondary institutions. “Successful adoption and scale will require policies that balance carrots and sticks—rewarding institutions that

produce results and applying pressure on low-performing institutions to produce better results (M. L. Collins, 2009, p. 20). Authors following this narrative path argued that policymakers could assume the role of determining which programs were most effective and if schools were using taxpayer money well to serve students because they have access to the “real” data on efficacy from the “best” scholarly research.

To actualize these tasks, the authors utilized the discourse of policy fiat to formulate multiple tools of adjudication. Namely, the dominant ideas were to adopt statewide developmental education plans, to centralize data tracking systems, and to define performance based metrics so that performance-based funding could be implemented or empowered, should it already be in use. Again, 35 states have a form of performance-based funding already in use (Snyder, 2015); the policy document authors then articulated how to directly connect the incentives to performance-based funding.

“States that want to improve student outcomes significantly need to create incentives for institutional efforts to develop and test new approaches that might require changes in traditional policies around the academic calendar, funding rules, and instructional delivery” (Achieving the Dream, 2012, p. 7).

“[Policy change should] ...provide performance-based funding incentives for community colleges that successfully transition developmental education students to college-level courses and postsecondary credentials” (Price & Roberts, 2009, p. 6).

The standardization of performance metrics here relied on the previously discussed interplay between standardization and efficacy discourses. However, authors did not

show consensus on the effectiveness of performance-based funding as an incentive nor its particular application. Some authors argued to support colleges with more funds, seeing performance-based funding as a bonus to those colleges with the best outcomes. For example:

State policymakers should support institutions by providing them with financial incentives to develop strategies that yield improved results with remedial students. In other words, colleges and universities should be rewarded for demonstrating success working with students from diverse academic backgrounds. (Parker, 2007, p. 6)

Other authors saw performance-based funding serving a punitive function if colleges generated low outcomes. This direct power then allowed for policymakers to suggest adjudicating what works in developmental education without directly prescribing the solutions.

Another idea authors argued for was to increase overall funding for developmental education reform initiatives. This was an intermediate theme. Others sought to shift the funds elsewhere. In a more extreme form, one author argued that “tax credits for employers who create apprenticeships, which is now done by South Carolina, might be considered as well” (Holzer, 2015, p. 5). Here, under the idea that developmental students should be tracked to vocational programs, it is the businesses who should get the money once slated for developmental education, businesses harmed by postsecondary institutions’ inability to educate a workforce. In its most cynical form, an author drew upon the discourse of policy fiat and expressed:

At least some of these approaches will likely generate political and legal pushback from the higher education community, both public and private, who might prefer the status quo (and especially those who teach “liberal arts” at the former), though the additional resources provided to them could help limit their opposition.

(Holzer, 2015, p. 4)

This was in no way was a dominant theme. But in representing the extreme view, it ideologically positions itself against the *liberal arts* portion of the academy, showing a recognition that scholars have proposed alternate ideas and notes of caution in the face of performance-based funding (Volkwein & Tandberg, 2008).

Finally, an intermediate theme emerged linking policy to access. Examples from the data follow.

“The Connecticut Department of Higher Education and the community colleges themselves are concerned about the link between higher need for developmental education, higher dropout rates, and lower numbers of transfers and four-year degree completion among Black and Hispanic students” (Carroll, 2011, p. 5.

“These data clearly underscore the need to provide opportunities for more students to access a postsecondary education and to complete a college credential or degree” (Fulton et al., 2014, April, p. 3).

“Developmental education placement is particularly important to community colleges because their open access admission policies and outreach to students from underserved groups mean that a much larger share of their students take



developmental education courses than do those in other postsecondary sectors” (Horn & Radwin, 2012, p. 19).

The analysis of these data show that authors did link policy to access. However, the authors drew upon the dominant discourses to articulate the harmful theory of developmental education nearly exclusively. So, while authors did acknowledge that educational policy was critical to access, the dominant discourses identified developmental education as a barrier to access because it was viewed as ineffective. Some authors argued for improvement instead of elimination of developmental education; for example, “As long as open access remains a core operating principle for these public institutions, improving developmental education and increasing student success are goals that go hand in hand” (Perry, Bahr, Rosin, & Woodward, 2010, p. 64). Yet, the overall dominant discourses did not produce contexts where authors would likely link developmental education as a tool to support access to post-secondary institutions.

In sum, the discourse of policy fiat created the conditions of possibility whereby authors generated two separate notions of policy as both the direct engine of change through innovation or second as the adjudicator of change through incentivizing postsecondary transformation. Both practices still relied on the decree of fiat. By synergistically relying on the interdiscursive pathway generated by the crisis, accountability, efficacy, and standardization discourses, the discourse of policy fiat shaped subject positions for policymakers that may be attractive to ideologically diverse audiences. Who in elected office would not want to help maligned students resist prosaic faculty by being innovative or by adjudicating how tax dollars are spent? As one author noted: “Administrators and faculty of the individual colleges *must acknowledge the*

*transformation which is expected of their institution* [emphasis added] and elevate their work on behalf of their students” (Carroll, 2011, p. 10). The command to “acknowledge” a lack of choice, a lack of agency, speaks to the weight of policy fiat as a discourse.

Finally, the *power* here was not solely concentrated in hierarchical forms of power through policy fiat alone, a Marxist critique. Instead, the symbolic power of social science quantitative methodologies was driving the efficacy and standardization agendas. Hence, the value of this investigation is to see that symbolic power, operated through the discourses of crisis, accountability, standardization and efficacy, these “invisible grid[s] of intelligibility” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93), justified the use of hierarchical power in policy fiat. Authors produced the truths needed to justify hierarchical power by misrepresenting the scholarly debates about the effectiveness of developmental education. When policy-document authors drew upon these discourses to make developmental education appear naturally harmful to student success, the state government appeared justified to issue proscriptive commands to all developmental education praxis. In reaction to this “natural,” harmful tendency of developmental education, the policy document authors drew upon the discourse of policy fiat to construct empowered subject positions solely for policymakers by *producing truths* about developmental education. Empowered subject positions for students and faculty were absent from the data, leaving many avenues for solutions or improvements to developmental education, and subsequently access, unexplored.

Drawing upon the dominate discourses, policy document authors portrayed students as either encumbering society with the cost of their “remediation” or as being developmental education’s maligned victims. No cohesive complimentary subject

positions existed for them in the dominant discourses, despite a clear thread of critical scholarship that sees value in differently-prepared students (Ashanti-Young et al., 2014). Similarly, faculty were portrayed negatively, as prosaic, ineffective teachers unable to help students graduate. Authors argued that faculty needed to be habituated into standardized efficacious teaching practices by policy. Furthermore, the dominant discourses did not construct possibilities where faculty could be given the agency to innovate changes in developmental education. Summarily, only policymakers were afforded complimentary subject positions by the realities produced by the dominant discourses. The agency of students and faculty alike were rendered mute. It is here, then, in this landscape of policy discourses that the sounds of silence emerge.

## CHAPTER 8: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Silences

From the larger list of policy silences listed in Appendix E, several require further discussion in light of understanding the dominant discourses and subject positions identified through this investigation.

Reflecting on academic freedom is warranted because of the construction of the habituated subject position for faculty through the interdiscursive effects of the discourses of standardization, accountability, and policy fiat. A review of the legal history of academic freedom shows that multiple Supreme Court decisions in the 1950s and 1960s guarantee faculty of public institutions the right to teach curricula, within their field of expertise, in a manner they choose because teaching is an exercise in free speech (Chait, 2002; Kaplin & Lee, 2007). Reviewing *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479 (1960), Kaplin and Lee (2007) quoted the rationale of the court:

The state may not, consistently with the spirit of the First Amendment, contract the spectrum of available knowledge. The right of freedom of speech and press includes not only the right to utter or to print, but the right to distribute, the right to receive, the right to read and freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought, and freedom to teach—indeed the freedom of the entire university community. Without those peripheral rights the specific right would be less secure. (p. 252)

Considering that the discourse of policy fiat created the conditions for authors to justify curricular fiat (what curricula should be composed of, how long curricula may last, and even what pedagogical techniques may be used), and because there are technical examples of such laws in place, for example in Florida (Hu et al., 2016), this legal history

of academic freedom catalyzes the discursive silence. The legal history is clear. Faculty in postsecondary institutions cannot be told by the government what or how to teach within their field of study. Developmental education and English are both long established academic disciplines with professional associations and scholarly journals.

This then leads to questions of the marginalization of faculty through curricular fiat. This is not a new problem. Scholars have commented before: “The [Commission on Higher Education’s] ruling -made without consulting those of us who taught the course- dramatized for us how invisible composition’s work and student writing are to the ruling apparatus of our state’s higher education institutions” (Grego & Thompson, 1996, p. 63).

Interestingly, the legal birth of tenure is in part linked to the history of protecting academic freedom of faculty during the Civil Rights Era (Kaplin & Lee, 2007), a time when questions about access to higher education and national equity between social groups were being asked. When governors tried to have faculty fired for advocating for civil rights, tenure was reinforced in part to protect academic freedom (Kaplin & Lee, 2007), the idea being that faculty could teach freely without retribution. Given the historic nature of the stratification and educational segregation in the United States (Parker et al., 2014) and the contemporary segregation of developmental education to community colleges (Soliday, 2002), the arguments to save taxpayers money by restricting the instruction of developmental education to two-year not four year schools, becomes even more suspect (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Jehangir, 2002). With this history in mind, curricular fiat is all the more egregious.

In this, the role of adjuncts in developmental education becomes even more salient. Remembering that 65% of faculty who teach developmental education are

adjuncts (Schults, 2001), and that tenure is seldom offered to contingent faculty (Chait, 2002; Schreyer, 2012), it is hardly surprising that developmental faculty have not organized a legal response to curricular fiat. However, “as is also the case for First Amendment freedom of expression claims, neither tenure, nor a particular faculty rank, *nor even full-time status* [emphasis added], is a legal prerequisite for faculty academic freedom claims” (Kaplin & Lee, 2007, p. 247). The role of faculty in improving outcomes for developmental students cannot be underestimated, and as NADE scholars (Boylan & Saxon, 2009) and others (Schreyer, 2012) suggest, improving work conditions and training for adjunct faculty may be the most expedient way to improve outcomes for developmental students.

It should also be noted that there is clear evidence that when the proximal outcome of developmental education is measured (passing credit-bearing coursework), the results still fall behind reasonable expectations (Bailey et al., 2015). To improve access, developmental education is not a panacea for all students in all institutional settings; there is clearly room to improve the curricula and pedagogical practices used to teach developmental education on many levels, including critiquing notions of “standard” English (Horner & Lu, 1999). Fortunately, scholars have devoted entire careers to the task of improving developmental education (Grubb & Babriner, 2013). But if policy discourses create conditions of possibility that either exclude faculty or construct solely prosaic and habituated subject positions for them, confrontational not collaborative environments may arise.

Moving forward, another major silence was that existing models of student persistence (Tinto, 1987) and retention and student success (Kuh et al., 2007) from higher

education scholars were absent from the discourses and data. The one reoccurring idea in the data was that "...the pipeline for students persisting in developmental education sequences is 'very leaky.... As Complete College America argues, time is the enemy for student progression in remedial courses' " (Fulton et al., 2014, p. 36). This idea drove much of the acceleration agenda. The idea was that shortening the time in developmental education will lower student attrition. However, again the vast majority of correlational research does not test experimentally for the impact of developmental education on attrition (Bailey et al., 2013). Instead, I argued previously that these correlational studies measure the *underpreparedness* of students for which developmental education is only a discursive label. This metaphor, of developmental education being an especially leaky pipeline, is problematic because *any college course*, especially a more rigorous course, is a potential exit point. "...[T]hose students who place in developmental courses and do not take them are equally likely to fail the first college-level course two or three times" (Boylan & Saxon, 2009, p. 4). Developmental classes are not so different from credit-bearing classes that they have a monopoly on driving away students. This error in the interpretation of data occurs partially because multi-dimensional theories of access, retention, and persistence, like those of Tinto (1987) and Kuh (2007), were obscured by the dominant discourses. The consequence is that instead of expanding support for underprepared students across their *entire* college career (a very minor alternate theme), or of broadening what counts as "prepared", or changing the academy to be more inclusive in valuing different ways of knowing, the policy document authors who employed the dominant discourses were focused almost solely on trying to fix the *discrete* experience of developmental education placement and coursework.

Finally, the paramount silence in my estimation concerned access to higher education. Parker et al. (2014) hinted to this issue in their research on developmental education asserting “The discourse around developmental education is thus reduced to one of function and utility, leading to an alarming disconnect between policy and practice” (p. 154). I concur with Parker et al. (2014), who argued there is a “moral imperative” (p. 164) to serve the most historically underprepared, underprivileged in society. What my scholarship shows is that the dominant themes in third-party policy documents don’t adequately account for developmental education’s *role in access* to postsecondary education. The consequence is stark. If the dominant discourses produce realities where it is unlikely for policymakers to holistically critique developmental education as a point of access to postsecondary institutions, with both pejorative and supportive outcomes, then where do equity and access make tangible inroads into public debate for *underprepared* students? Of a surety “recent immigrants and returning veterans may need basic skills development to be ready for college level work” (Russell, 2008, p. 2). Whether or not one supports or dismisses the efficacy of developmental education, to fail to consider access is to miss out on a crucial aspect of developmental education. My results show that access was barely considered by policy document authors. Instead, the dominant discourses were drawn upon to produce realities where developmental education was summarily seen as pejorative, in effect eclipsing developmental education’s original goal of generating access to higher education.

### **Summary of Significance and Contributions to the Field**

The significance and contributions of this study can be categorized into two primary areas: applications for research and practice and implications for policy. Through



a review of each context, the value of this work will be summated. Recommendations for policy and future research are also included.

### **Contributions to research and practice.**

This study contributes to the body of scholarship that records how policy and scholarly discourses (Horner & Lu, 1999; Soliday, 2002) shape the teaching of developmental education and writing in postsecondary institutions. In addition, this study contributes to the greater field by applying policy discourse analysis to a highly-debated topic within higher education (Bailey et al., 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012; Parker et al., 2014), offering a clear process for how this hybrid methodology can be applied. This study then works as an example of how to use interdisciplinary scholarship and policy discourse analysis to contribute to scholarly discussions in meaningful ways.

One simple recommendation for researchers is to clearly denote if their studies apply to both developmental English and developmental math or just one discipline. There are issues of identity at stake when teaching English (Horner & Lu, 1999). Also, I argue that practical and scholarly recommendations need to account for the differences between math and English curricula and pedagogy as well. If those innate differences are not addressed in practical or policy recommendations, then unintended consequences may occur from implementing the recommendations.

Moving forward, the interdisciplinary nature of the study proved fruitful. The literature review drew heavily on scholarship from both the disciplines of higher education and English. Working across the social sciences and humanities opened the possibility of seeing numerous issues in research conducted on developmental English education. By including a detailed analysis of the challenges in research design, it was

shown that there is a persistent conflation of correlation and causation in some efficacy research conducted on developmental education, a finding supported by Attewell et al. (2006) as well as Goudas and Boylan (2012). Simply, the fact that too few developmental students ever graduate does not lead logically to the idea that developmental education does not work. Developmental education was designed as a tool for access not a tool to ensure graduation. Asking whether or not developmental education adequately supports access to the academy is separate from asking if developmental education is helping students graduate (developmental education *was not designed* to affect graduation). The dominant discourses created conditions of possibility where authors misconstrued correlation and causation, judging developmental education against, what I assert, are the wrong criteria. Instead, I have shown that much of the efficacy research conducted on developmental education is more accurately understood as a discursive label for *underpreparedness* to attend college or being differently-prepared. I also acknowledged that institutional preparedness to educate students is also being described by the label “developmental education” as well. I conclude then that current constructions of developmental education cannot always improve the preparedness, as required by dominant norms of the academy, of all the students who take developmental coursework not because the coursework is flawed but because the gaps in student preparedness as well as institutional preparedness are too large. However, what is lost in scholarly language is that this means a student with eighth grade reading and writing skills may not be able to improve their academic skills to college readiness in a few courses. It also acknowledges that teaching all faculty at an institution to be aware and sensitive to different dialects of English is both costly and difficult professional development work.

The outcome of this insight is crucial. I propose that if scholars shift their chosen language in their research designs and writings from *developmental education* to *underpreparedness* (of students, post-secondary institutions, and state support), the focus of the research would become unrestrained from the narrow topic of sequential courses at the beginning a student's matriculation and allow scholars to review points of support spanning all a student's academic experience. Clearly, if the focus was a narrow review of just developmental education, then that label would be fine. But as shown, in cases where developmental education is tied to distal outcomes like graduation, developmental education is only accurately a discursive label for underpreparedness. This underpreparedness would need to be placed into a comprehensive theory of access, with students, institutions, and state support all as key sites for responsibility. Underpreparedness could be students' readiness academically, socially, their motivational acuity, or their access to fiscal resources. Or the gap in outcomes may be the result of other factors, barriers like systemic racism on a campus. What is valuable in this shift in language is that it could allow for a much wider scope of scholarly research and input. Underpreparedness must be carefully discussed not as a pure attribute of the student, but rather an effect of the holistic educational path of the student, including the systems that supported their educational path. In other words, scholars must trace the holistic preparedness of a student and the systems that supported them up until college.

Furthermore, this theory of access cannot become dichotomized into prepared vs. underprepared. Rather, it must contain various attributes or foci that could be measure or described. This theory would not result in a metric like an IQ score, a single number. It would be conceptualized as a comprehensive theory of access. Furthermore, again the

underpreparedness of institutions to value and accept a diverse range of student agency must also be included. Thus, the preparedness of students, institutions, and state governments to embark on educational journeys would be the foci. Finally, by shifting this language, scholars may be able to begin to counter the now dominant idea that misconstrues correlation and causation, blaming developmental education for lowering graduation and labor market outcomes.

This idea of shifting the language, the discourse itself, is a key area for scholars to step outside of the dominant discourses that pervade discussion of developmental education. I suggest a few key steps for the discursive changes that can improve scholarship. First, as said before, scholars should use the terms “underpreparedness” and “preparedness” to avoid a strictly deficit focused model when discussing students. Second, scholars should also discuss students as “differently” prepared, instead of insufficiently prepared, so that the different forms of English that the students speak are seen as assets. Clearly, no student can be underprepared in their own native language to communicate. The question is, does that language benefit from the privilege of being recognized by the academy (Horner & Lu, 1999). Under a new theory of access, a different framing of what “counts” as prepared could be recognized by the academy. Using Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model would be one strong starting point as it could be seen as accounting for the diverse value of six kinds of cultural wealth of differently-prepared students.

Thinking further on this, a linchpin of debate has been identified in forming standards for college entrance (Fox, 1999). Simply, any standards made, any prerequisite knowledge of English, must be based on some level on a particular dialect of English.

One cannot write a placement test for college without choosing words, and those words must come from some strand of a particular form of English. The debate that Fox (1999) identified and discussed showed that some scholars would abolish all placements tests and all developmental education so not as to privilege any form of English. Other scholars have wanted to make the test as linguistically and culturally inclusive as possible, a debate that has also occurred on other standardized writing tests like the SAT (Addison, 2015). Still, other scholars do not discuss a problem using a placement test with standard English as long as it accurately places students in developmental courses (Baliey et al., 2015). Thus, pressure exists from higher education scholars to eliminate developmental education because it is seen as inefficacious (Baliey et al., 2015), and the same pressure to eliminate developmental education is also applied from composition scholars who see developmental education as a form of cultural and linguistic prejudice (Horner & Lu, 1999). However, other scholars argue to not eliminate developmental education because of its crucial role in access to higher education (Parker et al., 2014; Attewell et al., 2006). Undergirding all of these debates, my scholarship shows how dominate discourses are shaping and effecting policy landscapes, leaving only developmental education, not students nor policymakers, accountable for outcomes.

From my perspective, developmental education is essential to access to higher education for a number of critical reasons. First, understanding the nuanced argument that teaching English is a political and ideological act, the practical reality is that students from underrepresented populations who don't have access to privileged English still should have access to college. Developmental English education is one method of helping them gain access to college by giving them time to master *academic* forms of

English. This is not an ideal choice, but it places the practical value of access to college above the theoretical argument of language assimilation. It is not a choice to not improve or re-design developmental education; instead, I see this as a trade-off as developmental education is improved over time. Furthermore, by utilizing pedagogical approaches that value student agency (Horner & Lu, 1999), developmental English faculty may be able to mitigate some of these negative effects of learning a standard English. My contribution is to develop a theory of access that is comprehensive; one that includes more than language acuity of students, and one that redefines language preparedness more holistically to allow for a broader acceptance of student agency.

Furthermore, I do think that some students are unprepared for college and this leaves them unable to communicate effectively in *academic* environments. To be clear, their communicative skills work well in particular linguistic markets (Bourdieu, 2003), just not in academic markets, and they provide alternate forms of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). To respond to this, developmental education should be reimagined not as the purview of solely English faculty, but on disciplinary lines. Simply, instead of believing that a single standard English can and should be taught to prepare students for college, an alternate structural choice would be to embed writing and literacy skills courses into academic disciplinary pathways, modeled on shifting accountability for teaching writing and literacy into Writing in the Disciplines or Writing Across the Curriculum pathways (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2010). In this proposed structure, students would not enter postsecondary institutions into a generalized developmental English education course. Instead, if needed, they would enter, based on multiple metrics, into a developmental course designed to prepared them to write and read in their academic discipline, be it

biology, Gender Studies, or English. Then, the standards utilized by the specific academic discipline would be the undergirding standards, not a singular imaginary English (Greenfield & Rowan, 2011). Furthermore, the developmental courses and ancillary supports, should address far more than writing and literacy acuity. They must address a theory of access that is more holistic incorporating factors related to motivation and external supports. This said, more discussion of this proposed theory of access is needed.

As I described previously both in this chapter and in Chapter 5, creating a theory of access for college is crucial to improving developmental education. I argue to expand the concept of basic skills past preparedness in math and English towards a more comprehensive, research-informed theory of access including factors like motivation or grit, financial stability, access to transportation, community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and other factors. Yet, this theory would have to be balanced by multiple metrics of institutional preparedness so the foci was not explicitly on students. As a third pillar, the level of state support, the fiscal and alternate methods of support for post-secondary institutions, as well as K-12 educational systems, would also be included. For example, if states do not fund known measures that have been strongly supported in equitably preparing students' education, like high-quality public pre-schools (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Masburn, 2010) then their commitment to access would be understood as weaker. As seen in both the data analysis of this dissertation and in previous scholarship (Fox, 1999), discussions of student preparedness often focus on deficits of the students. I do believe students can be held to standards without recreating an elitist privileged cultural assimilation. This can be accomplished by theorizing access as multifaceted, like Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (H. Gardner,

2011), and by seeing students as potentially differently-prepared instead as deficient. In these ways, a theory of access for college could better legitimate the need for developmental education for some students, while still holding institutions and state policymakers accountable for outcomes. Developmental education could continue to provide access to higher education without relying strictly on privileged English. Developing such a theory of access in detail far supersedes the goals of this dissertation, but the contribution of this inquiry is to show the need for such a theory. Here these initial ideas simply give some context for conceptualizing a theory of access.

Reflecting in a different vein for future research, scholars cannot ignore the complex but crucial debates about efficacy research design (Goudas & Boylan, 2012). Scholars can continue to find trustworthy, credible, and accurate ways to measure the effects of developmental education on student access and success. First, this will require continued focus on understanding how to measure efficacy without the ethically-viable<sup>24</sup> capacity to randomly select students into formal experiment trials. Specifically, while the regression discontinuity design is one solution to this issue (Bailey et al., 2013; Melguizo et al., 2011; Moss & Yeaton, 2006), it does not test the most academically underprepared students (Bailey et al., 2013). Scholars therefore need to find alternative methods to test the impact of developmental education on student success. One promising method lies in utilizing the qualitative longitudinal design of Sternglass (1997). Second, scholars need to account for the heterogeneity of developmental programs (Merisotis & Phipps, 2010) when designing their research. In addition, if this heterogeneity is absent from their

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<sup>24</sup> One could conceivably randomly assign students into developmental or non-development coursework, but because it has been shown that underplacement harms students (Bailey et al., 2013), and because underprepared students may need developmental education, the ethics of such a study would be highly questionable.



published findings, their work will be more easily subsumed into sweeping generalizations, and policy recommendations, about highly distinct developmental programs.

Moving forward, the questioning of the hierarchy of *scientific* research, based only in positivist frameworks, must continue to occur. When basic principles of scholarship like correlation and causation are conflated, and the truth of efficacy scholarship is believed in a steadfast manner, the impact on both inquiry and policy may be immense. Epistemic diversity in inquiry may help mitigate these errors. Therefore, more interdisciplinary scholarship should be conducted, both across higher education and English, and higher education and math. This also supports the need to train scholars of higher education to identify the ontological and epistemic principles that undergird scholarly inquiry paradigms and methodologies.

Moreover, this conflation of correlation and causation occurred in part because of how authors drew upon dominant discourses. The meaning of the label of *developmental* has been lost in both the literature and policy documents. There are real students who do not have the academic capacity to perform college level work, unless that level of work has no definition. Thus, one recommendation is for higher education scholars to form a delineated conceptual model of college preparedness and a theory of how to grow college preparedness. This suggestion then aligns in part with the current field of “non-cognitive” research that focuses on motivation, grit, and other psychological factors. Yet, my recommendation is not to look for a singular metric or preparedness like motivation but rather create a holistic model of college preparedness that includes academic skills, motivational capacity, social supports, and other factors. However, creating a common

definition of college preparedness is fraught with the potential to stigmatize and harm students by creating labels and initiating self-fulfilling prophecies. Simply, it would be easy to fall into utilizing deficit discourses, defined by Bertrand et al. (2015), where students are blamed for their own deficits, their inequality in graduation rates a cause of their own flaws. So again, the creation of the theory of access would need to balance the foci on conceptualizing student preparedness and institutional preparedness. Furthermore, one outcome of this study shows that a working *theory* of college access, based on far more than linguistic and mathematical competency, could help shift the conversation past the narrow task of improving developmental education and towards a theory of access and retention that is multifaceted and continuous throughout a student's matriculation. While I suggested the briefest sketch of a theory of access, the full creation of such a theory would require copious additional work, effort worthy of a future potential research agenda.

Finally, moving to both research and practice, the error of conflating correlation and causation has other major implications. Because policy document authors employed dominant discourses to delegitimize developmental education, the study of developmental pedagogy and practice may be negatively impacted. Simply, acquiring funding to study what is seen as a "bridge to nowhere" (Complete College America, 2012)<sup>25</sup> is clearly fraught with challenges. Continued scholarship must help identify practices that improve the success of developmental learners while remembering that how English is taught effects the identity of those students (Horner & Lu, 1999). Crucially, social scientists cannot be the only respected body of scholars on which to

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<sup>25</sup> Remember, the authors of this document celebrated acquiring 30 governors' signatures on their proposal to eliminate developmental education.

judge the efficacy of practices; English and developmental faculty in general must be included too in policy debates. In addition, scholarship should study the effect of providing continuous support to the most underprepared students across their entire matriculation, not just their time in developmental programs, to determine if continuous support, instead of discrete coursework alone, improves student success. For example, if a college were to provide a direct mentor to each developmental student for their entire matriculation, longitudinal studies could review the mentoring program's impact.

In brief, scholars who study developmental education should use extra caution to not conflate correlation and causation when looking at the efficacy of developmental education in impacting graduation rates. Developmental education is a tool for access not an insurer of graduation. Scholars should continue to find pedagogical and curricular practices that have the highest impact on students, and developmental faculty must be part of that work, not only subjects of the studies from research institutions. Finally, support for the most underprepared developmental students should be expanded across students' matriculation, and those new practices should be tested for their impact on student success.

### **Re-framing policy.**

Allan (2008) has noted that the significance of policy discourse analysis lies in understanding the dominant discourses and in exhibiting policy silences. This investigation meets that definition by providing a clear picture of the dominant discourses and the ideas supported therein concerning developmental education and policy. One key finding is that 42 percent of the documents analyzed made explicit reference to Achieving the Dream, Jobs for the Future, Complete College America, or the MDRC. It

was shown that prominent institutions, researchers, and associations have made it their prerogative to define and report data on developmental students. Horn & Radwin (2012) have also shown that some of the key organizations leading the data reform effort nationally include: Achieving the Dream (ATD), Complete College America (CCA), the Community College Research Center (CCRC), and the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA). While the missions of these groups differ, ranging from data-driven program improvement (ATD), to college accountability (VFA and the U.S. Department of Education), to state policy reform (CCA), they have much in common in terms of the metrics they have defined and in some cases the data that they collect and report (Horn & Radwin, 2012, p. IX). There are numerous problems with the third-party impact on policy.

It was shown that a key problem was that most of the policy document authors ignored the highest quality statistical research that indicated both positive and negative impacts on graduation prospects for developmental students (e.g., Attewell et al., 2006). By solely focusing on what can change for underprepared students in the classroom or as ancillary supports in the first year, policy solutions were not considered that could support underprepared students throughout their entire matriculation. Simply, funding initiatives like a continuous mentoring program across a student's matriculation were not considered. The dominant discourses were drawn upon to support the spurious conclusion that developmental education harms most developmental students' graduation prospects. Indeed, many students, perhaps as high as 30 percent, are underplaced into developmental education and subsequently harmed by it (Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2014; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014). Reform is clearly necessary. However, for the

remaining 70 percent of students, the dominant national call to end or accelerate all developmental coursework, without thinking through how to support these underprepared students, may lower access. This especially comes to light considering that Attewell et al. (2006) found that 50% of African American graduates and 34% of Latino graduates in 1992 had taken a developmental course. Thus, they conclude that if these students had not been allowed to enter postsecondary institutions because of their standardized test scores, then racial equity gaps in graduation would have been greater than they were. Furthermore, historical evidence in CUNY (Parker & Richardson Jr, 2005) and current evidence in Florida (Hu et al., 2016) support the probability that eliminating developmental education could harm access. As stated before, a core finding of the study is that the lack of a unified theory of access leaves scholars, and therefore, policymakers, with only developmental education and developmental educators to blame. If developmental education is not considered as a point for access, then its fundamental role in postsecondary institutions is obfuscated.

In a different track, the historic connection to previous research is also key. The data showed that the historic deficit theory of students in the 1990s, identified by both Fox (1999) and Soliday (2002), has been transformed. The supposed *literacy crisis* of this era was blamed on students being lazy, unteachable, uncultured. Scholars pushed back (Fox, 1999) arguing that this deficit theory about students was fundamentally racist and classist. Through the analysis of current dominant discourses, it is now clear that the “crisis” is still a dominant theme in the discursive landscape. What has changed is the target of the crisis. Instead of a literacy crisis, some now argue that there is a developmental education crisis. Because it is no longer politically correct or acceptable to

blame students for their own deficits alone (a fact that is still occurring), now, policy writers can draw on the dominant discourses to blame faculty through a linguistic turn of personifying pedagogy. But more importantly, it was shown that this blame of faculty occurs through the seemingly “objective” lens of science through the utilization of efficacy discourses. Blaming poor developmental education course design is a thinly veiled attack on faculty capacity, but it is clear that some scholars think developmental educators are to blame for low student graduation rates, even five and six years after the students have left those faculty’s classrooms.

Again, the dominant discourse of *educational crisis* still exists in the larger discursive landscape, and it is drawn upon in these new ways in an effort to cut funding from post-secondary institutions in a stated attempt to preserve the economic health of state governments. In a parallel track, policymakers who choose performance-based funding [PBF] in order to make colleges accountable for low graduation rates threaten to take money from schools serving the least privileged members of society. Educating students who are prepared for ivy league institutions is not synonymous with teaching developmental students, but often the idea of PBF is to give more money to the “successful” schools, the state flagships, and cut the funding from unsuccessful schools, community colleges with low graduation rates. These students who come from the least funded K-12 systems would enter the least funded college systems. Realizing this kind of logic, it is no wonder then that equity gaps in educational attainment still exist over decades of attempted solutions. When funding issues are eclipsed by dominant discourses that focus solely on the accountability of students and faculty, not the accountability of policymakers, the opportunities for change are severely limited. Moving forward,

policymakers should look at the structural causes of inequitable educational preparedness by looking at structural inequities in the funding of both of colleges and funding of K-12 systems of education. Students do pass through K-12 educational systems graduating from high schools underprepared, so the supports of those K-12 systems should also be considered. Eliminating *the need* for developmental education by providing effective K-12 education is a categorically different goal than eliminating developmental education because to save on its costs.

Furthermore, because of the potential high impact from third party think-tank institutions on shaping and reinforcing particular discourses, the warnings made by scholars (Addison, 2015; Goudas & Boylan, 2012) against private philanthropy's intentional shaping of public policy seems ever more urgent. Policymakers need to be informed on whether that are speaking to ideologically driven third-parties or professional scholars. Policymakers need to be informed about the history of "crises" that have pervaded over time. This research provides an opportunity to explain to policymakers how the imagined crises have been reconstructed in current discourses.

Specifically, the discussion chapters show that current dominant discourses shaping developmental education produce solely pejorative subject positions for students as maligned or as encumbrances and for faculty as prosaic. Instead of drawing on the rich cultural wealth of racial minorities (Green, 2001), or the thoughtful advances in pedagogy and curricula offered by English scholars (Horner & Lu, 1999), and instead of utilizing theories of access and retention from scholars of higher education (Kuh et al., 2007), the policy document authors exclusively shaped empowered subject positions only for policymakers as innovators and adjudicators. Of course, policymakers can take actions

that support developmental students, but the challenge is in identifying what policy choices improve student success.

The dominant discourses allow for a simplified answer – standardize all solutions for developmental education through policy mandates – policy fiat. Furthermore, through the analysis, I have shown that these commands were justified through the uptake of the standardization and efficacy discourses. Scholarship that works to codify answers to efficacy through statistics, over a wide range of developmental programs, needs homogenized control and experimental groups. Thus, principles of validity in statistical research design, namely standardization, empowered the justification of policy mandates. Policy document authors utilized ideas operating within the discourses to (perhaps unintentionally) appear like “insiders” who were simply applying educational principles to education. This disguised the role of the elimination agenda by obscuring it to look like reasoned fact. Policymakers need to be informed about the breadth of the debate about developmental education’s efficacy. They need to know that scholars don’t as a whole agree about the efficacy of developmental education.

As a result, foregrounding alternate discourses is important because the current dominant discourses draw clearly on the histories of segregation (Fox, 1999) and stratification (Soliday, 2002) in education. Ethics matter (Parker et al., 2014). While the intent of policy document authors assuredly is unlikely pernicious, scholars and policy makers must resist discourses that re-inscribe historic forms of privilege that operate by gatekeeping access to higher education, intentionally or not. Proscribing prejudged vocational paths through policy fiat is not the solution to challenges with developmental education. For certain, policymakers should not use policy to funnel students towards



particular employment paths, either through direct fiat or through policies that limit access to education. The problem with intentional vocational tracking reminds me of a famous Burundi adage: “That you do for me without me, you do to me” (Brown, 2015).

Finally, the solidification of a theory describing this policy process in *policy fiat* can contribute to a wider understanding of how policies are formed and how they impact change, a topic of continued interest in policy research (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

Understanding how discourses of crisis, accountability, standardization, and efficacy created conditions for exercising symbolic power, allowing authors to justify policy fiat for developmental education, shows *a process* by which policies are shaped. Likewise, by illuminating personified pedagogy, I showed how authors could critique faculty without directly mentioning them. In brief, the process of utilizing the label of developmental education to generate a false sense of objectivity about both students and faculty shows how discourses construct truths through obscurity.

The assertions of my arguments aside, one tenet of scholarship informed by poststructuralist methods is that all research is unfinished, incomplete, and only part of multiple realities and truths constructed through productive power (Lather, 1993). Thus, self-critically, it is fair to say that this manuscript itself reinscribes dominant discourses, unintentionally, through its discussion of preparedness and underpreparedness. First, that binary has been shown to be false both by educational statisticians (Baliey, 2013) and scholars who study access and discourses (Fox, 1999). Simply, my claim that developmental education, as discussed in most efficacy research, is better understood as a label of underpreparedness, in part, recreates a student deficit model. Indeed, the placement tests, ACCUPLACER and COMPASS, are by definition designed to identify

students with deficits, not the deficits of institutions. I chose the word preparedness knowingly because I do believe that students can be underprepared for college while understanding this term's potential problematic recreation of dominant discourses. However, to counter this reinscription, I have worked to fully acknowledge that the placement tests are, in part, flawed. I also worked to show that the lack of concrete theory of preparedness, that included many more criteria past math and language ability was needed. Furthermore, I also proposed a theory of access that would expand the discussion of preparedness past a sole focus on students to include postsecondary institutions and state government supports. Thus, I argued that a central issue which empowers the recreation of dominant discourses is the lack of the theory of preparedness and theory of access. Without nuanced theories through which to discuss access and student readiness, dominant binary models are more easily taken up. I argue that student preparedness needs to remain a topic of focus, but scholars and policymakers must transcend a discourse of simple binaries.

Finally, I only offered brief sketches of these ideas for two reasons. First, this dissertation did not warrant their creation; simply not enough scholarship was reviewed to complete that task. Second, and more importantly, these theories would have to be constructed with the intent to elide dominant discourses. However, as many scholars have noted, no research falls outside of discourse (Allan, 2008; Lather, 1993), and the credibility of scholarship is both historical and incomplete (Lather, 1993). Thus, I do not assume that a concrete and well supported theory of access would make developmental education function well, that it would grant access, or that would illuminate alternate

discourses. I offer merely a step towards improvement, not the perfection of a system nor the complete amelioration of complex problems.

On the whole, I argue that developmental education is an imperfect tool which provides access to higher education for students from all segments of our population, access that indicates the moral strivings of the country (Parker et al., 2014).

Developmental education can be improved to more equitably provide access for all who participate in it, most successfully through collaborative processes with scholars from across academic disciplines. Historically, students were blamed for their own poor outcomes in education (Soliday, 2002). Today, developmental education now is the target for the blame for equity gaps in educational outcomes for constituent student groups. Dominant discourses of crisis and accountability continue to eclipse alternate discourses in some policy debates. Furthermore, the measures of accountability through policy fiat are now justified by the discursive elements of efficacy and standardization. Ultimately, I therefore argue that the most critical contribution of this investigation lies in the learning about the policy process understood through this investigation. The discourses constructively shaped possibilities for *how* policy document authors believed educational policies should impact developmental education. The productive power of discourses was exposed. Multiple opportunities for improving developmental English education that have been identified by scholars and practitioners were revealed, despite being nearly obfuscated by the dominant discourses in the policy landscape. Finally, this work suggests that further inquiry is warranted to understand how dominant discourses produce the policy landscape. Aspects of societal equity are at stake when determining who may attend and how they may access higher education.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Policy Document List

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## Appendix B: Phase 2 Document Notes

Phase 2 Document Notes													
Author/Org	Year	Title	Organization Type	Pages (#)	Academic Citations (Y/N)	Number of References	Students Depth (Y/N)*	Faculty Depth (Y/N)*	Funding Agencies	Policy Brief (y/n)	Policy Report	Summative Report	3rd Party Mention
<b>National Level Documents</b>													
ATD	2010	The DevEd Initiative	Think/Tank, N	10	n	0	1	1	Jobs For the Future	x			y
Fulton/ECS and	2014	Devel Strat for Co	Think/Tank, N	47	n	47	2	1	Lumina/ Bill and Melinda Gates F/I		x		y
Horn and Radwin	2012	The Completion A	Think/Tank, N	82	n	14	1	1	Lumina/ Bill and Melinda	x		x	y
Fulton ECS	2012	Using State Policy	Think/Tank, N	13	n	13	1	1	Education Commission	x			n
Price and Roberts	2008	The Working Poor	Think/Tank, N	7	n	17	1	1	Ford and Mott Foundations		x		n
Collins	2009	ATD Set-Up Succ	Think/Tank, N	32	n	29	2	2	ATD	x			y
Kurlander	2012	Lit Brief College E	Think/Tank, N	16	y	52	3	2	College Board	x			n
Holzer	2015	HED and Work Fo	Think/Tank, N	9	n	40	2	1	Brookings	x			n
IHEP	2012	Supporting First-G	Think/Tank, N	28	y	23	5	5	Walmart	x			n
Helmcamp	2010	CPPP Policy Page	Think/Tank, N	10	n	26	4	2	CPPP	x			y
Bracco et al	2015	Reform Dev Ed	Think/Tank, N	8	n	16	2	2	West Ed	x			n
SEF	2013	Trends and Challe	Think/Tank, N	5	n	16	2	1	Southern Ed Foundation	x			n
NCPP	2011	Policy Alert	Think/Tank, N	8	n	11	5	1	Bill and Melinda Gates	x			n
Asmussen and Ho	2014	Campus-Based Pra	College Asso	17	y	62	3	4	MidWestern Higher Education Com		x		n
Acevedo-Gil et al	2014	Perspectivas	College Asso	5	y	83	4	4	UCLA Graduate School of Ed		x		n
Russell	2008	Enhancing College	College Asso	9	n	15	2	2	AASCU		x		n
Complete College	2012	Bridge to Nowhere	Think/Tank, N	13	n	0	1	1	Complete College Amer	x			y
Turk et al.	2015	State Policy as To	Col-Associ	18	y	26	2	4	American Council on Education		x		n
Parker	2007	Ending col rem: C	Col-Associ	8	y	16	5	3	ASHE and Lumina	x			n
The Civil Rights	2012	Policy Brief, Build	Col-Associ	5	n	0	3	1	UCLA Civil Rights Proj	x			y
Barnett et al	2012	NCPR Brief	Col-Associ	4	y	6	1	1	National Center for Postsecondary Research				y
<b>State Specific Documents</b>													
Learning Works	2014	CAP Study	Think/Tank, N	4	y	8	2	2	Learning Works	x			n
Duncan-Poitier et	2012	SUNY Pathways to	Col-Associ	45	y	24	5	3	SUNY System Admin			x	n
Heldenfels et al	2012	2012-2017 Statwic	Col-Associ	36	y	16	3	4	Texas Higher Education Coord		x		y
Boylan et al	2009	Creating Quality D	Col-Associ	15	y	5	2	5	National Center for Developm		x		n
CAHS	2011	DE at Connecticut	Think/Tank, N	11	n	19	4	1	Connecticut Association for Hu		x		y
Morrissey and Li	2012	Reconsidering Plac	Col-Associ	4	y	2	2	1	North Carolina Community Co		x		y
Perry, Rosin, Wo	2010	Course taking patte	Col-Associ	85	y	101	5	5	EdSource			x	y
<b>2nd Sources</b>													
Schults	2000	AACC	Col-Associ	11	y	6	4	4	AACC			x	n
Baliley et al	2005	Paths to Persistenc	Col-Associ	44	y	37	2	2	Lumina, CCRC			x	y
Rutscho and Schn	2011	Unlocking the Gate	Think/Tank, N	87	y	154	2	2	MDRC			x	y
Gould and Comp	2009	Communications C	Think/Tank, N	8	n	4	na	na	Hewlett Foundation				n
Hoffmann	2005	Add and Subtract	Think/Tank, N	29	n	12	1	1	Jobs For the Future		x		n
Friedel and Thort	2013	PBF	College Asso	20	y	33	na	na	U of Alabama		x		n
Non-Credit-	2014	CCLC Policy Brie	College Asso	2	n	0	na	na	Community College Lea	x			n
Murphy et all	2014	CA and PBF	Think/Tank, N	7	n	7	na	na	Public Policy Institute of	x			n
Conforti et al	2014	New Apporaches	College Asso	30	y	39	3	3	National Association for Developm		x		y
Parsi et al.	2010	Cost of Multiple P	Think/Tank, N	52	n	14	na	na	Policy Analysis for California		x		n
Hu et al	2014	Dev Ed Florida	Think/Tank, N	8	n	3	1	1	Center for Postsecondar	x			n



## Appendix C: Coding Category Summaries

Key:

**Dominant Topics with Majority Support = Bold**

*Intermediate Topic = Italics*

Competing Topics = Underlined

~~Alternate Topic = Strike Through~~

### Problems - List of Categories

1. **DE Outcomes** (almost unanimous negative topic)
  - a. **Don't Pass SE sequence**
  - b. Lowers persistence
  - c. No gatekeeper credit
  - d. **No graduation effect**
  - e. Few measurable positive outcomes
2. Cost, Labor, Workforce
  - a. *Lack of DE Funding*
  - b. Economic Problems
  - c. **DE as waste of time and money vs. Cost of not training youth**
  - d. **DE harms workforce and global economic competitiveness**
  - e. *Cost of not training youth*
  - f. Financial aid (waste or lack of fiscal support)
3. Policy and Policymakers
  - a. **Lack of policy incentives**
    - i. *connected to labor market outcomes*
  - b. **lack of addressing affordability and transfer**
  - c. **policy as barrier**
  - d. ~~*DE prevention at 4 year and 4 Year Issues*~~
  - e. non-mandated valid placement methods
  - f. "different worlds" of HED and Policy
4. Assessment (almost unanimous negative Topic)
  - a. *High Stakes Misunderstood*
  - b. *No Test Prep*
  - c. **Assessments Misused/ Poor Process**
  - d. College Readiness Not Defined
  - e. **Underplacement**
  - f. **Non-Standard Policies for Assessment and Placement**
5. DE Programs
  - a. **DE "Does not Work"**
    - i. **Traditional DE does not work**
  - b. DE takes too much time
  - c. *Skipping DE Sequence*
  - d. *Course Sequence = Problem*

- e. DE Curricula
  - i. **Traditional courses don't work**
  - ii. **Pedagogy problems**
- f. *Lack of common curricula*
- g. DE Faculty
  - i. DE are part time faculty
  - ii. ~~*Low training and funding*~~
  - iii. Faculty push back
- 6. Student Factors
  - a. **Rate of DE rising**
  - b. *Minorities and Poor*
  - c. Working While in School
  - d. Adults
  - e. First Gen
  - f. Stigma / Frustration
- 7. *High School Issues*
  - a. Weak High Schools Provide Low Access
  - b. Students Harm Themselves
  - c. College Readiness Not Defined
  - d. Poor 12 to College Counseling
- 8. Access
  - a. *traditional DE is obstacle for access VS. ending DE hurts access opportunities*
- 9. Student Support Services
  - a. Poor advising
  - b. Poor funding for DE support services
- 10. Data and Research
  - a. Research Design Issues
  - b. Lack of Standard Placement Policies and Assessments
  - c. *Lack of Data Sharing Systems*
  - d. *Lack of Efficacy Research*
- 11. Underpreparedness
- 12. Community Colleges Themselves
- 13. Leadership Admin

### **Faculty Categories**

- 1. Faculty
  - a. Retrain
  - b. Write Curricula
  - c. Involvement Critical
  - d. Use Poor Pedagogy

### Student Categories

1. Range of Remediation Needs
  - a. Unskilled not trainable
  - b. Send lowest DE to career track
  - c. Send strongest DE to credit
2. **Poverty / Low Income**
3. *Poor K-12 Systems*
4. *Low Understanding of High-Stakes Testing*
5. Range in Goals
6. **High Rates of Minorities**
7. *First Generation*
8. *Adults*
9. ELL
10. ~~Cost of Not Training DE~~

### Discourse Shaping Categories

1. **Workforce**
  - a. *US Economy and Graduation Rates*
  - b. *Workforce Needs Tied to DE*
  - c. *DE Needed for Job Market*
  - d. *State and Workforce Need*
  - e. *Vocational Path for DE*
2. Multiple Missions of Community Colleges
3. Defining Success
  - a. Links to Graduation vs. Remediates Low Academic Skills
4. *Policies Critical for Access*
5. **Specific Interventions**
  - a. Better Research
  - b. Summer Bridge
6. “Policies Do”
  - a. Aggressive Policy
  - b. Policy and Funding Rules
  - c. Improvement by State Policy
7. Standardization
  - a. *Standard Placement Testing*
8. **Accountability**
  - a. Jury Out
  - b. *Some Positive Signs DE Works*
9. Non- HED Institutions (3<sup>rd</sup> Parties)
10. States
  - a. NY
  - b. TX
  - c. CA
11. Clash of K-12 Standards vs. College Readiness

### Solutions of Policy List of Categories

1. *Statewide Developmental Education Plan*
  - a. *Coordinating Board*
  - b. Accelerating Policy Initiatives
  - c. *Flexibility at Institutions vs. Prescriptive Policy*
  - d. *Fiat*
  - e. **Data Driven Policy**
    - i. Assess Efficacy of Policies
2. Funding
  - a. **Performance Based Funding**
  - b. Fund DE Reforms
3. **Accountability**
  - a. **Define and Use Performance Metrics**
4. 3<sup>rd</sup> Parties
5. *Credits Must Transfer*
  - a. Common Course Numbers
6. **Curricula**
  - a. Redesign
  - b. Standardize Curricula
  - c. *Eliminate Layers & Accelerate Curricula*
  - d. *Remove all DE Curricula*
7. **Assessment/ Placement**
  - a. **Require Multiple Measures vs. validate multiple measures placement**
  - b. **Standardize College Readiness**
  - c. Policies Facilitate Placement
  - d. Integrate K-12 Curricula

### Solutions of Practice Categories

1. Reduce DE Need
2. High School
  - a. *Remediate in HS*
  - b. **Align Curricula**
  - c. Collaboration
  - d. Dual Enrollment
3. **Improve Placement/Assessment**
  - a. Define college readiness
  - b. Diagnostic testing
  - c. Avoid developmental education when possible
  - d. Reduce misplacement with HS GPA
  - e. Use standardized placement tests
  - f. Review/ test-prep before assessment
  - g. Many other solutions

4. **Redesign Curricula**
  - a. **Acceleration**
  - b. **Modular Coursework**
  - c. **Contextualized Curricula**
  - d. *Co-requisite curricula*
  - e. *Student Success Courses*
5. Faculty
  - a. *Train adjunct faculty*
  - b. *Train DE faculty*
  - c. Pro Development for Cultural Awareness
  - d. Numerous alternate solutions
  - e. ~~Provide full faculty status, pro-development, curricular oversight~~
6. **Ancillary Supports**
  - a. Summer Bridge
  - b. **Learning Communities**
  - c. Tutoring
  - d. *Advising/Counseling*
7. Learn from Leader Colleges vs. Innovation
8. Communication strategies around DE
9. External/ Community Partnerships
10. Pathways
11. **Better Research**
12. **Data Collection/Use**

**Appendix D: Themes**

- A need for an educated workforce and state or national competitiveness drive the need to fix developmental education.
- Developmental education is a broken system that does not work, based on poor student graduation rates and labor market outcomes.
- Standardized assessment, curricula, pedagogy, and developmental education programs, all mandated through state policy, will allow quality efficacy research to determine what works for developmental education.
- Students are poor minorities who come from broken K-12 systems and need access to the workforce through vocational training.
- Faculty must be retrained.
- Fixing the educational pipeline from high school to college requires aligned K-12 curricula, improved placement with mandated multiple measures, and standardized college readiness.
- Fixing developmental education itself requires retraining faculty, increasing ancillary supports for students, and redesigning curricula through acceleration.
- Policy must centralize DE oversight in the state, mandating standardized assessment, placement, curricula, pedagogy, and by collecting data on the efficacy of these practices.
- Policy must create accountability using the incentives of command, defined performance based metrics, and the implementation of performance-based funding.

## Appendix E: Silences

- There was almost no mention of faculty's academic freedom to write curricula or teach.
- There was no mention of any major theories of persistence (Tinto) or completion (Kuh) from higher education scholars.
- Student agency was addressed by only a single document that noted the cultural value of Latinos (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, & Solorzano, 2014). No other mention of students bringing skills, talents, or value (even in widening diversity of a campus) to the colleges were found. Instead, the documents fell in line with the deficit theory from Fox (1999).
- No pedagogical references to either critical or poststructural scholars' work on developmental education were cited in a single discussion of pedagogy or curricula.
- No theory of underpreparedness or preparedness was given.
- Only a single document defined the remediation need as years of missed competency (i.e., saying some developmental students have a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level).
- No mention of the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) was made by any author except for the one policy document written by NADE administrators (Boylan & Saxon, 2009).
- Almost no references used came from the following academic journals: Journal of Developmental Education, The Journal of Basic Writing, College Composition and Communication (CCC), or Writing Program Administration (WPA).
- There were very few comments on cultural viewpoints for access.
- There were very few mentions of assessment in its relationship to ELL students.

## BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Born in Oswego, Aaron Rich Tolbert grew up in upstate New York, in the snow country just off Lake Ontario. He graduated from G. Ray Bodley High School in Fulton, NY in 2004. He matriculated at the University of Vermont in Burlington, VT, where he served as both a tutor and resident advisor for three years. In 2008 he earned a BA in English and a BS in psychology with a minor in chemistry. He then stayed at UVM as a graduate research assistant in the Writing in the Disciplines program where he conducted research on numerous topics in the field. Aaron completed a thesis in 2010, *Questions of Agency: Wordsworth and Natural Impression*, which was a study of British Romantic poetry and language tropes utilizing both deconstructive and critical theories.

He took his first job with the University of Maine for Kent as a Reading a Writing Specialist in the TRiO program, working with underprivileged students in the northernmost part of Maine. Teaching developmental English education in this context inspired him to apply for the doctoral program in Higher Education at the University of Maine, Orono. He completed the majority of his program almost exclusively through advanced video technology from a distance in real-time, pioneering doctoral coursework in the digital age.

Aaron is currently a full-time English professor at Schenectady County Community College in Schenectady, NY. There, he teaches developmental English, composition, and literature courses and is the Chair of the college's Student Success Initiative. Finally, he lives in Niskayuna, NY with his wife Cherise and daughter Arimaea. Aaron is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education, with a focus in Higher Education, from the University of Maine in May, 2017.