

# Four Decades of JDE Interviews: A Historical Content Analysis

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**ABSTRACT:** *This content analysis examines the topics, trends, and issues impacting developmental education and its professionals as evaluated by interviews that have appeared in the Journal of Developmental Education (JDE) between the issuance of Volume 1 through Volume 39. A total of 76 interviews were analyzed with attention to interviewees, major foci, and additional sub-topics.*

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The inaugural issue of the *Journal of Developmental & Remedial Education (JDRE)*, funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, was released in the spring of 1978 by the Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State University. Under the direction of Milton “Bunk” Spann as Editor and May Garland as the Managing Editor, the new journal was focused on the needs of a growing field comprised of learning center personnel, administrators and faculty teaching basic skills subjects, postsecondary administrators, counseling/guidance specialists, and Upward Bound and Special Services personnel. Articles covered a myriad of topics of interest to this diverse readership. Furthermore, Gary Saretsky, as one of the pioneers of the National Association for Remedial/Developmental Studies in Post-Secondary Education (NARDSPE; later to be known as the National Association for Developmental Education), initiated the long and fruitful association between the *Journal of Developmental Education (JDE)*; formerly *JDRE*) and the organization. Since these first tentative steps taken by the editorial staff at the Center for Developmental Education, the *JDE* has become the voice of the field and for the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE).

True to May Garland’s promise in the first issue, a consistent feature of the *JDE* has been the inclusion of interviews with key people related directly to the field or individuals from other fields who provided expertise that would push the readership in new directions. The first interview was with John E. Roueche and was conducted by Garland. Roueche, at that time, held the rank of Professor and served as the Director of the Community College Leadership Program at the

University of Texas, Austin, along with being the author of seminal texts of importance to the field such as *Overcoming Learning Problems: A Guide to Developmental Education in College* (1977), and *Developmental Education: A Primer for Program Development* (1977). Indeed, this interview was an auspicious beginning to an ongoing feature.

Now with the 40th anniversary of *JDE* we celebrate not only the content of peer-reviewed articles and timely columns but also the 76 interviews that have been regularly published over these years. These interviews have both shaped—and been shaped by—the significant conversations going on in the fields associated with developmental education.

But what were the foci of those conversations, and who were some of the key voices leading them? These questions were the impetus for the present project, a content analysis of all interviews published in *JDE*. Hence, the goal of this content analysis was to examine the trends, issues, and people involved in four decades of interviews in the *JDE*. A total of 76 interviews were analyzed, identifying primary content foci (macro themes), secondary content foci (micro themes), interviewees, and interviewers.

## Content Analysis Research on Academic Journals

Content analysis research focusing on the journals and yearbooks in fields where developmental literacy researchers and theorists might publish has been undertaken regularly. Although these might be called “big tent” publishing venues, as they cross a range of pedagogical borders, they offer models of content analysis that were foundational to the process we followed. Hence, we looked at content analyses of the journals and yearbooks of the International Literacy Association (e.g., Pearson, 1992; Reutzel & Mohr, 2014; Stahl & Fisher, 1992), the Literacy Research Association (e.g., Guzzetti, Anders, & Neuman, 1999; McKenna & Robinson, 1999), the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers (e.g., Schumm, Lewis-Spector, Price, & Doorn, 2014; Still & Gordon, 2011), the National Council of Teachers of English (Brass & Burns, 2011; Dutro & Collins, 2011;

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Roosen & Lunsford, 2011), the International Writing Center Association (Lerner, 2014), and the independent journal *Reading Improvement* (Knudson, Onofrey, Leikam Theurer, & Boyd-Batstone, 2002).

Two content analysis projects from journals or yearbooks (Bauer & Johnson, 2011; Bauer & Kendall Theado, 2014) deserve more than passing mention as both of these analyses pertain directly to journals dedicated to the fields of developmental education and learning assistance. Bauer and Johnson (2011) reviewed 222 articles that appeared in *The Journal of College Literacy and Learning (JCLL)* and its predecessor name *Forum for Reading* to determine the topics and themes that could be identified for issues released between 1972 and 2009. The topics they identified included content-area reading, reading comprehension, reading strategies, technology, developmental education, multicultural concerns, and ESL instruction. As a second vector of analysis, the authors compared the appearance of these themes across 272 articles from the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, the *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, the *Journal of Developmental Education*, the *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Research in Developmental Education*, and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. The authors identified the trends and issues associated with postsecondary literacy instruction across the time parameters that these journals covered. In conclusion the authors stated that “JCLL provides a wide range of articles within postsecondary literacy and pedagogy...this provides for a strong base of scholarship and contribution to the field of postsecondary literacy” (Bauer & Johnson, 2011, p. 48).

A second report of a content analysis study (referred to as a research synthesis in line with Shanahan, 2002) appeared recently in the *Journal of College Reading and Learning (JCRL)*. Bauer and Kendall Theado (2014) analyzed 62 articles appearing in *JCRL* between 2005 and 2013 to answer two primary research questions: 1. What pedagogical practices are being emphasized to support the literacy learning and development of college-aged readers?, and 2. What theoretical frameworks are being employed by postsecondary researchers to interpret and support study findings and conclusions? The researchers identified foci associated with the improvement of reading competency: metacognitive reading strategies, self-regulation, and self-efficacy and motivation. Bauer and Kendall Theado concluded that authors published in *JCRL* are exploring social constructivist, social learning, and social cognitive frameworks as lenses for interpreting research.

We share these authors’ interest in the shaping of a professional field, as viewed through the lens of journal content. Thus, we endeavored to explore the professional history of the field of developmental education, with these other models to guide our approach and protocol.

## Methods

The following research questions guided our examination of *JDE* interviews:

- What were the major topics of interest to the field (a) as indicated by inclusion as a primary focal issue in a *JDE* interview and (b) as indicated by inclusion as a secondary focal issue in a *JDE* interview?
- Who were the major influences on the field as indicated by inclusion as an interviewee in a *JDE* interview?

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this consideration enabled us to develop a catalog of topics across these interviews that might be useful as a reference in future explorations. It is important to note that this content analysis focused exclusively on the *JDE* interviews and did not attempt a comparative analysis with other recurring or special features or columns in the *JDE*.

## Materials

We started by gathering all 76 interviews through the final issue of Volume 39 published in the history of *JDE* since its outset in 1978, utilizing one author’s hard-copy collection as well as the current *JDE* Editor’s archives. The dataset included three oral histories as well as two multiperson interviews. Basic information including article title, year of publication, volume and issue, interviewee name and affiliation, and interviewer name and affiliation were entered in an Excel spreadsheet. Also, the full text of all interviews in the dataset were photocopied, organized chronologically, and distributed to each member of the research team. We also verified that the dataset was complete by a thorough hand search of all issues of the *JDE*.

## Coding Procedures

In developing the coding protocol, we adopted general content analysis guidelines and principles identified in works by key scholars of content analysis research (Berelson, 1952; Hoffman, Wilson, Martinez, & Sailors, 2011; Krippendorff, 2004). We also looked at other text-based content analyses (Brozo & Johns, 1986; Stahl, Brozo, & Simpson, 1987; Stahl, Simpson, & Brozo, 1988; Williams, 2013). We utilized Berelson’s (1952) recommendation to build inter-rater reliability by collapsing themes through a recursive process of creating, verifying, collapsing, and reverifying. As such, where we may have lost some specificity, we gained reliability. We approached this on two levels: First, on a macro level, we categorized overarching themes or topics that were dominant in a particular interview and therefore summed up the major focus. Typically, these macro themes were reflected not only in the articles’ titles but also in the language of the article. Second, we categorized secondary themes or topics that represented minor points (micro themes) raised within an interview. Each of these analyses will be described next.

**Macro themes.** We initiated the work of analysis by reading all interviews and employing open coding individually to identify macro themes. Once our individual lists of initial macro themes were complete, the group met for an inter-rater reliability check and to come to a consensus about each article’s primary macro theme. Although there was considerable overlap, there were some differences—often terminology-related in nature—and these differences were resolved through discussion. An Excel spreadsheet was developed to keep track of macro theme codes and to facilitate further analysis.

We identified 16 macro themes initially and worked individually to collapse these into 12 themes. As an example of how the process was undertaken, one author grouped “disability” and “athletics” as *student groups*, whereas another author lumped “graduate training,” “athletics,” and “disability” into *miscellaneous*. After extensive discussion, the final theme of *students* was decided. The authors then created definitions of each of the 12 macro themes by examining the content of the interviews and correlating with existing definitions in the scholarship. With clearly defined macro themes, the authors collapsed themes once more, moving from 12 macro themes to a final list of eight (*models and philosophies, teaching and learning, retention, scholarship, history and heroes, students, systemic reform, and professional development*).

**Micro themes.** It was clear from the outset that, although we could identify primary macro themes that offered a high-level sum-up for the major foci, multiple other topics came up in each

interview as well. As the questions asked in an interview typically directly correlated with the answers, these secondary-level topics, or micro themes, were identified through the interviewers' questions (what themes/topics were interviewers asking about) for all interviews. Although we initially looked at the questions only, we decided that if there was a response that was significant beyond what the question asked, we included that in our micro-level coding. During this level of analysis, the culling of the three oral histories occurred as they did not fit the structure of typical interview question and answer. Therefore, there were a total of 73 interviews for the micro analysis.

Once we independently completed analysis for micro codes, we compared them to find similarities and agreed upon terminology for the categories. For example, when examining a question in the interview with William E. Moore [Garland, 1979], "Can the anger and frustration of high-risk students be directed toward something more productive?" the authors agreed that the feelings of anger (the initial micro code) referenced the emotional/social problems that high-risk students bring to higher education. Therefore, we decided *affective issues in higher education* was an appropriate code. We started with 502 micro themes across 73 interviews. After multiple rounds of collapsing, we finally ended up with 33 micro themes. Ultimately, decisions about micro themes were based upon use of this content analysis to do research, so we attempted to label themes that might be of interest or importance.

## Findings

Our purpose for this content analysis was to examine the topics, trends, and issues (both primary and secondary in focus) that have appeared in the *JDE* in the form of interviews over the past four decades. We report results of the content analysis in this section, beginning with the results for the macro themes.

### Macro Analysis Findings and Discussion

The macro themes were established through identifying the overarching, dominant topic in each interview. Topics and interviewees are selected by the editor of *JDE* often with the recommendations and support of the Board of Editors. Hence, they have had rather direct impact on these primary focal topics. In the sections that follow, we will first present a definition of each macro theme followed by the findings of the content analysis associated with the respective macro theme, and secondly a discussion about those findings. In this section, we attempt to avoid any confusion

possible from the multiple types of references included. Hence, traditional APA citations are used for references such as methodologies, histories, and literature reviews that are listed under the traditional reference section. References citing an author-interviewer are bracketed, and full citations are listed alphabetically in the separate Bibliography of *JDE* Interviews posted at [www.ncde.appstate.edu](http://www.ncde.appstate.edu).

**Teaching and learning macro theme.** The teaching and learning theme is comprised of instructional-oriented interviews that include content on "good teaching" and instructional approaches meeting the needs of a developmental education student population. More specifically, the three subthemes of math, strategic learning, and learning styles were identified initially as separate macro themes during the first round of analysis, but these were ultimately collapsed into teaching and learning-related issues or approaches (Berelson, 1952). Although

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the components of math, strategic learning, and learning styles fit under the general theme of teaching and learning, they were specific enough to maintain as subthemes. (There are also interviews that fall into a more general grouping within the theme as they cover broadly identified teaching-related trends and issues.) Topics identified and placed in this macro theme received consistent coverage in the *JDE* interviews throughout the past four decades. In all, 21 interviews were categorized as teaching and learning; within those, 7 interviews were classified as general, and 14 had specific identifications as math ( $n = 5$ ), strategic learning ( $n = 4$ ), and learning styles ( $n = 5$ ). General interviews addressed Piagetian approaches to teaching and learning [Blanc & Moninger, 1981], computer literacy [Akst, conceptualizations of good teaching [Morante, 1985], the connections between teaching and the campus community [Claxton, 1991], changes and trends in postsecondary teaching [Hodges & Hand, 2005], critical thinking [Johanson, 2010], and self-directed learning [Saxon, 2013]. In order to truly analyze the macro theme of teaching

and learning, the three more broadly identified macro subthemes require individual analysis. Next follows each subtheme's definition and content analysis findings with discussions about those findings.

**Math subtheme.** The macro subtheme of math includes five interviews corresponding with teaching and learning strategies, standards, and curriculum improvements and innovations related to improving student success and learning in developmental mathematics. The first appearance of the subtheme of math was in 1993, following the 1992 award of a MacArthur fellowship grant to Philip Uri Treisman [Garland, 1993] for his work with the math workshop model. This focus on mathematics continued in 1995 with two interviews centered around curriculum reform: one explored the technology of the graphing calculator and the second interview focused on developing standards to revitalize the introductory mathematics curriculum. In 2000, Robert Hackworth, a longtime leader in the field of developmental mathematics education, discussed the changes in mathematics education at community colleges and purported that, although arithmetic was only a minor portion of most developmental education math programs in 1985, in 2000 it was a common entry-level course for many students in community colleges [Miles, 2000]. The 2011 interview with Paul Nolting, a national expert in improving math success with study skills, identified reasons more college students place into developmental math than any other subject and why so many fail to complete developmental mathematics [Boylan, 2011]. Surprisingly then, the macro theme of mathematics does not appear in interviews after 2011, though it is certainly a critical conversation in developmental education, especially given the nation's growing focus on STEM education across the past decade.

**Learning styles subtheme.** The second macro subtheme encapsulates the idea of learning styles as a theory and practice of individualized or differentiated ways of learning. All four interviews in the subtheme focused on differences in students' approaches to learning and a need for individualization that supported and emphasized the field's promotion of student-focused developmental education versus remedial (deficit) education. Notably, the macro subtheme of learning styles was a topic of interest from 1981 until 1990 during a period when practitioners were hungry for approaches that tapped into each person's unique potentials for successful learning. As these systems became more well known, and even covered in textbooks used in the developmental education and student success classrooms, there became less reason to focus on the topic via the *JDE* interviews. Perhaps more recently this topic has not appeared in



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subsequent interviews because a growing number of impactful articles have pointed out there is a lack of research supporting learning styles (see Willingham, 2012).

**Strategic learning subtheme.** The macro subtheme of strategic learning has been conceptualized as being grounded in both the scholarship and the philosophy of cognitive psychology and has included effective strategies for reading and learning. Five interviews were classified under this subtheme. In a 1986 interview, John Bransford, an internationally recognized cognitive psychologist, explained strategic learning as part of problem-solving, particularly as it related to content, context, and experience [Jenkins, 1986]. Walter Pauk's 1998 interview reflected his scholarship and recommendations drawn from his long career in writing about methods and techniques for effective studying in articles and texts [Kerstiens, 1998]. More recently, strategic learning as conceptualized by Michelle Simpson and Sherrie Nist [Stahl, 2006] and Claire Ellen Weinstein [Acee, 2009] emphasized cognitive and strategic behaviors in the learning process.

The interviews within the overall theme of teaching and learning, particularly during the first decade of *JDE*'s publication, addressed teaching and learning approaches that were thought to be developmental versus remedial in nature. Perhaps during the early history of the field of

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developmental education, as it coincides with the publication of *JDE*, the focus in the minds of the editors in selecting the interviewees and interview topics, was on promoting developmental theories pertinent to educating nontraditional students as opposed to continuing the idea of remedial instruction. Arendale (2005) asserts by the early 1970s the label and philosophy of developmental education was becoming more widely accepted as the focus on student development increased.

The higher number of interviews in this macro theme during the earliest years of the *JDE* might also be explained by the belief that a focus on individual needs, effective learning, and tailored instruction were developmental

alternatives to remedial and/or compensatory education. Then over the years, as the differentiation between developmental and remedial teaching and learning became clearer and accepted by members of the field, it may be that the editors felt that interview topics and interviewees should cover a more just in time, topical subject matter, thus meeting the particular needs of those in the field at the specific point in time.

**Systemic reform.** The macro theme of systemic reform reflects a broad conceptualization of reform that is not respective of any particular time in the history of the field, and it incorporates the topic of policy as it regularly drives reform initiatives. This definition assumes that systemic reform in higher education includes educational philosophies that guide changes to all components of an institution or larger educational authority. Although reform may vary widely in design and purpose, it is aimed at achieving common goals and objectives and is intended to produce change initiated through political agendas and philosophical positions from a variety of perspectives and for a multitude of purposes.

Overall, systemic reform was a consistent theme throughout the years supporting the notion that the field of developmental education has consistently been involved in and evolved through a change process since its inception. This theme includes 16 interviews with 8 of them

falling into the 10-year span of 1982-1992. This timeframe of interviews addressed community college reforms pertaining to problems associated with open door policies [Brannan, 1982], changing basic skills requirements within the workforce [Pitkin, 1984], the "Gordon Rule" in Florida and its impact on higher education [Hackworth, 1985], federal policy pertaining to higher education [Combs & Boylan, 1985], equal opportunity in higher education [Thompson, 1988], the liberal arts and practices promoting transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities [Enright, 1988], the involvement of developmental education in politics to help shape federal policies and priorities [Tierney, 1991], and insights on future workforce opportunities and necessary skills as well as how higher education might best prepare students [George, 1993].

Following a 4-year gap between 1993 and 1997, the final eight interviews span the years from 1997-2013. The theme of systemic reform continued with interviews conveying various programs like the Texas Academic Skills Program [Hodges, Corkran, & Dochen, 1997] and Achieving the Dream [Boylan, 2008]. Other interviews covered the inclusion of resources and services for all students rather than for only the underprepared [Spann, 2000] and provided historical context for the landmark Brown v. the Board of Education case and the decision's intended effect on education [Carriuolo, 2004]. Challenges and potentials in developmental education [Burley, 2007], student attendance and success patterns [Akst, 2007], transitions of developmental education as a holistic approach [Diaz, 2010], and developing political activism awareness [Shetron, 2013] were topics within the second grouping of the systemic reform theme.

As 50% of the theme appeared between 1982 and 1993 and correlates with a high concentration of the macro theme of teaching and learning, it can be surmised that early interviews in *JDE* demonstrate that the editors hoped to establish a unified voice for the field of developmental education so as to become a vehicle for change and innovation in higher education. Boylan (2016) asserts developmental programs are often first to innovate and be change agents for their institutions. Systemic reform logically follows the establishment of any discipline and, in the case of developmental education there was indeed reform although not always systemic reform. The reemergence of the theme in 1997 follows several years of a focus on retention and students within the *JDE* interviews. The transition from the importance and emphasis on retention to systemic reform may have been a product of moving from the attention on helping students stay and learn in college to a concentration on producing

change to make retention more possible. It is also seen that the *JDE* and individuals associated with the National Center for Developmental Education have been strong proponents of formative and summative evaluation plans, which naturally go hand in hand with reform initiatives.

**Retention.** The theme of retention includes various methods and programs for supporting students' success in college ranging from successful completion of students' academic goals of degree attainment (Levitz, 2001); to students meeting clearly defined educational goals whether they are course credits, career advancement, or achievement of new skills (Tinto, 1993); to students' successful academic and social integration into the college community (Bean, 1980). Interviews in this category all focused on this fundamental goal with discussion on how student support services help students to stay and learn in college and thus include the topics of access, retention, and completion.

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### *The theme transcends a range of classifications of both students and programs.*

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This theme contains 12 interviews. Although retention was a theme in the second year of interviews with a focus on Frank Christ and his expertise with Learning Assistance Centers [Spann, 1979], the theme of retention did not reappear until 1990 through 1996. During this 6 year stretch, interviews covered student attrition and retention [Spann, 1990], the freshman seminar [Crawford, 1993], student retention programs [Kluepfel, 1994], and Supplemental Instruction [Burmeister, 1996]. Again the theme of retention disappeared until 2008 but was then a yearly topic for the next 4 years. In those 4 years, interviews highlighted approaches and programs such as TRIO [Hodges & Sparks, 2008], metacognitive learning and learning assistance [Dawson, 2009], the past and present issues of learning centers [Calderwood, 2009], writing centers [Threadgill, 2010], and academic coaching [Webberman, 2011].

This second grouping of interviews focusing on retention (2008-2011) followed an increase in concern about the number of students who did not pass and had to repeat developmental courses and the associated cost. During the first two decades of the 21st century, developmental education received much attention from state legislators and college leaders as an increased responsibility to show higher success and retention rates emerged.

The 2015 and 2016 interviews demonstrated how retention continues to be a focus of the field with topics such as student advising [Harborth, 2015] and learning support centers [Walker, 2016].

**Students.** The theme of students evolved from the identification of a variety of interviews that focused on students from diverse or historically nontraditional student populations, those programs designed to serve them, and the issues that impact the postsecondary experience for these student groups. The breadth of interview topics found in this theme does not allow for broad-based generalizations about students as it includes great diversity with topics such as racial or ethnic identification, physical or learning disabilities, or language differences. Hence, the theme transcends a range of classifications of both students and programs particular to the population covered in a respective interview.

This theme contains nine interviews. Within the 1979-1992 time span, six interviews discussed students who were classified as minority high-risk [Garland, 1979], visually impaired [Dave, 1984], minority [Keeter, 1987], dyslexic [Lundquist, 1988], athletes [Bingham, 1989], and African American [Weber, 1992]. In 2001, there was a series of three interviews with Blenda Wilson [Carriuolo, Rodgers, & Stout, 2001], Yolanda Moses [Carriuolo, Rodgers, & Stout, 2001], and Juliet Garcia [Carriuolo, Rodgers, & Stout, 2002], whose backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences permitted each senior administrator to offer guidance on how developmental educators and colleagues across campus might promote talented minority students to achieve higher academic attainment. The interviewees addressed issues pertaining to students categorized as low income, minority, students of color, female, first generation, Hispanic, and African American. Although this series provided a short resurgence of this theme in the early 2000s, interviews associated with this theme have not been a focus for the past 14 years whereas the macro themes of retention, systemic reform, and teaching and learning have been more prevalent. Nevertheless, the *JDE* did not abandon an interest in the diversity found in the field and in higher education as these other themes covered issues impacting and programs servicing divergent student groups through micro themes that were identified within interviews.

As college leaders and state legislators began to shift interest from access to forms of accountability, such as benchmarks met and degrees earned, success in developmental education began to be measured on student retention and successful completion in gatekeeper classes. With the shift in interest to a greater interest on

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completion by underprepared students placed in developmental education, it makes sense that the theme of retention often followed a period of interviews concentrating on students. Fittingly, concern about retention would follow a focus on the types of students involved in developmental education.

**Models and philosophies.** The definition of models and philosophies theme was influenced by Kezar's (2001) explanation that a model "connotes a set of plans or procedures" (p. 26). Philosophy encapsulates the idea of the process of education as either developmental or remedial. This macro theme includes specific programmatic models as well as philosophies serving as foundations to those models. Inclusive in this theme are instructional, curricular, pedagogical, and programmatic models pertaining to andragogy, deficit orientations, learning communities, and international programs. Conceptions of particular models were regularly based on building upon what students can already do well rather than on a deficit viewpoint.

There were seven total interviews categorized in the models and philosophies theme. Five of the seven interviews occurred between 1978 and 1982. John E. Roueche was the first interviewee for the *JDE* and shared his thoughts on the past, present, and future of developmental education [Garland, 1978]. Three interviews from the same year all focused on models and philosophies. First, Terry O'Banion provided insights and experiences regarding the League for Innovation, a national consortium of leading community colleges [Cooper, 1980]. Next, Theodore K. Miller addressed student development, particularly the Tomorrow's Higher Education (T.H.E.) model [Badders, 1980]. Finally, Malcolm S. Knowles spoke about andragogy and self-directed learning [Rada, 1980]. Similarly, the interview with Arthur W. Chickering focused on meeting the needs of an increasing number of adult learners through individualized instruction [Hall, 1982]. Across the decades since, only two interviews were identified in the models and philosophy theme. Maggie Woodrow, who cochaired the European launch of the International Access Network, shared her international perspective on developmental education from the United Kingdom and European point of view [Lemelin, 1992]. Edward A. Morante referred to the importance of student assessment and placement in the role of retention and referenced a learning community model [Spann & Calderwood, 1998].

Although this theme was clearly of importance during the formative years of both the field and the *JDE*, particularly in 1980 when three interviews [Badders, 1980; Cooper, 1980; Rada,

1980] in the same year appeared, interviews in this theme fell off dramatically in later issues. In the modern conception of developmental education as an academic field emerging in the early 1970s, there was a need for a common philosophy around which members of the field could become a cohesive body. Hence, a number of interviews in *JDE* about models and philosophies reflected the belief that a unified philosophy was necessary in support of a new model of postsecondary education based on developmental theory.

**Histories and heroes.** The theme of histories and heroes was established as a way to classify interviews that included three life histories that were components of an oral history project developed to record the stories of individuals who played a prominent role in the access movement within the history of postsecondary education [Bauer & Casazza, 2005, 2007; Casazza & Bauer, 2004]. Several elements of this oral history project were shared in the *JDE* in 2004, 2005, and 2007 in which three life history narratives of K. Patricia

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### *Success in developmental education began to be measured on student retention and successful completion in gatekeeper classes.*

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Cross [Bauer & Casazza, 2005], Mike Rose [Bauer & Casazza, 2007], and Martha Maxwell [Casazza & Bauer, 2004] were presented. It should be noted that these interviews did not fit into the analysis scheme for the content analysis as the structure of this type of oral history life story was different from the 73 other interviews. The single work that comprises the second inclusion in this category appeared in 2012. The interview of Norman Stahl [Armstrong, 2012] best fit within this category as the interview addressed trends and issues both current and historical for the field as well as the responsibility of all developmental educators to be students of the field's history.

This theme, regardless of the structure of the four interviews, emphasized the importance of understanding the past in order to make informed decisions about the future of developmental education. Since a field must come of age for history to be covered or heroes to be identified, the lack of interviews fitting in this macro theme before 2004 is logical. The modern field of developmental education emerged in the early 1970s, so 30 years would provide a span of time necessary for the members of the field to just begin to have a sense of history.

**Professional development.** The theme of professional development references a wide variety of training programs, educational opportunities, or advanced professional degree objectives intended to help administrators, instructors, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness in serving developmental education students and in leading the field. In practice, professional development for educators encompasses an extremely broad range of topics and formats. For example, professional development experiences may be funded by higher education institutions, state and national education authorities, philanthropic foundations, or other private funding sources. They may range in various durations, formats, delivery methods, and facilitator types.

This theme is notably sparse throughout the four decades of interviews with four interviews. Two sequential years (1986 and 1987) addressed professional development. Joseph Lowman, author of *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching*, shared his thoughts on becoming a masterful teacher and the role of graduate teacher training programs in pushing teachers to continue to work toward improvement and excellence [Thompson, 1986]. The following year, Robert L. Somers explained telementoring and the role of electronic outreach for educational training [Hackworth, 1987]. Professional development did not resurface until 2002 when JoAnn Moody addressed faculty diversity and the role of recruiting and retaining women and minority faculty [Carriuolo, 2002]. Most recently, after an 11-year span, three doctoral programs for developmental education were highlighted by Olatunde Ogunyemi from Grambling State University in Louisiana, D. Patrick Saxon from Sam Houston State University in Texas, and Eric J. Paulson from Texas State University in Texas [Kincaid, 2013].

Notably, the absence of professional development at the macro level is problematic and reflects the issue of a lack of trained developmental educators in the field. However, training and professional development as a micro theme was a more regular occurrence, indicating that the topic was consistently brought up via the interviewers and/or interviewees. Perhaps due to the small number of programs and training opportunities centered specifically on developmental education, professional development as a macro theme was significantly smaller than other themes. Regardless, it is evident professional development remained a constant over the four decades of *JDE* interviews.

**Scholarship.** The authors built upon the American Educational Research Association (AERA) definition of educational research as being "the scientific field of study that examines





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education and learning processes and the human attributes, interactions, organizations, and institutions that shape educational outcomes” in developing the parameters for this theme (American Education Research Association, 2016). This was expanded to include all forms of scholarly inquiry and activity that improves various components of the field. Overall, this theme includes a common goal for research findings to be useful to practitioners and policy makers.

This theme was the smallest with only two interviews. In 1986, an interview referenced an ethnographic study (see Richardson, Fisk, & Okun, 1983) examining administrative influences on degree achievement by minorities [Richardson, 1986]. Four years later, James A. Kulik, a widely renowned higher education researcher, asserted developmental education did not have the infrastructure to support research like older fields [Bonham, 1990]. Although he purported the importance of developmental education research, he also addressed the difficulties associated with research in the field. Reflecting this problem, the theme of scholarship was not addressed at the macro level for the past 26 years. Yet, the micro theme of research and methodologies was prevalent throughout the four decades, particularly between the years of 2008 to 2016. It

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*Although he [Kulik] purported the importance of developmental education research, he also addressed the difficulties associated with research in the field.*

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makes sense that the theme of scholarship was addressed more regularly and consistently at the micro level.

### **Micro Analysis Findings and Discussion**

Micro themes are defined as the secondary idea strands that emerged throughout the interviews (73 total, as the three oral histories did not lend themselves to this analysis). These were discussion topics within the interviews that came up, either as a result of a focused question posed by the interviewer or in a response by the interviewee, but these were not the overarching focus of the interview. Although these discussion topics were not the dominant foci of the interview, as with the

macro themes, these were significant enough that they took the interview in a specific direction; in short, these were not merely mentionings but distinct conversation topics. In the section that follows, we will provide the results of the analysis of micro themes, as well as embedded discussion about these results, and we will conclude with an explanation of how scholars of developmental education can use these micro themes for their own research. In the sections that follow, we report general findings of the content analysis associated with the micro themes, organized by the larger groupings, and will include discussion about those findings throughout.

**Accountability issues.** The micro themes we grouped together under accountability issues were access, evaluation and accountability, fiscal issues, higher education, K-20 alignment and partnerships, and retention and attrition. These themes were grouped together because they all dealt with areas in which developmental education is accountable on some level, whether to state systems or boards of higher education (i.e., retention and attrition), within an institution (i.e., evaluation and accountability, fiscal issues), or to entire educational systems (i.e., access, higher education, K-20 alignment and partnerships).

The six themes that are grouped as accountability issues all had roughly the same number of

mentionings over the 73 interviews (12, 10, 12, 11, 9, 13 mentionings, respectively), and were mostly spread out over the four decades of *JDE* interviews. What may be of interest, though, is that very few of these (four total across all six themes) have had recent attention within the last 5 years.

**Campus supports.** The four micro themes grouped under campus supports had in common all being representative of institution-based units designed to support students. These included academic supports (i.e., academic support systems, developmental education, and Supplemental Instruction) as well as student affairs support units (student services).

Only 14 of the 73 interviews had an explicit secondary emphasis on the topic of the mission and role of developmental education. We found this interesting, given the focus and readership of *JDE*, especially since this did not emerge as an emphasis in the macro themes. Now, of course, developmental education (more generally) as the context for the primary and secondary topics occurred on some level in all interviews; however, the discussion specific to the mission and role of developmental education turned out to be less prevalent than we anticipated. Similarly, we were surprised that only six interviews included a secondary focus on academic support systems and another four on Supplemental Instruction. And, only 12 interviews included a secondary emphasis on campus student services such as advising and counseling. Especially given the history surrounding partnerships between such academic and student support systems and developmental education—not to mention the prevalence of professionals in these areas as NADE members—we expected to see far more emphasis in these areas.

**Content.** We grouped five micro themes together under the heading content because they all related to the subject matter of developmental education, including learning and study strategies; mathematics; and reading, writing, and critical thinking. We also included learning disabilities and technology here because the conversations related to these micro themes involved content-oriented foci, and because we consider these not as tangential to the content but rather integral to it.

In terms of the specific content foci of developmental education instruction, math had the most with nine, reading/writing/critical thinking had eight, and learning and study strategies had six. Only four interviews over the four decades included a secondary focus on learning disabilities, though it should be noted that several interviews did include a primary focus (see the macro theme analysis) on this topic. And, finally, 13 interviews involved some

secondary conversation regarding technology. It's worth noting that only five of these 13 have emerged in the last 15 years despite the evolution of instructional technologies and the widespread acceptance of New Literacies within the K-12 sector. In other words, it seems that more of an emphasis on technology occurred early on in the current technology revolution.

**External influences.** Only three micro themes were grouped together under the external influences heading: policy and legislation, reform, and societal and workforce needs. These themes all relate to issues outside education that influence and shape developmental education.

Policy and legislation emerged as a secondary topic in 12 of the 76 interviews, and issues related to reform have been addressed in 14 interviews over the years. Of course the nature of the reform has taken multiple shapes over the years after the first instantiation in 1978 and through the most recent in 2013. We found it

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*Nearly half of the interviews—regardless of the interviewee's role—indicated the importance of diversity through some secondary conversation thread.*

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interesting that fewer than half of each of these critical topics was identified as a secondary topic in interviews within the last 15 years, and more interesting that only three were identified in the last 5 years. Particularly given the prevalence of such conversations within the field over the past few years, we anticipated additional emphases in these areas.

As for societal and workforce needs, we only identified four interviews in which these issues arose (all in earlier interviews, with 1993 being the most recent). Still we found this to be a significant enough conversation thread that it warranted its own micro thematic category as the interviews that included this topic thread focused on the influence of societal and workforce needs on developmental education.

**People.** Five micro themes were grouped together under the very broad heading of people. Here, our focus was on the various individuals and groups affiliated with developmental education, both students (affective issues, diversity of students, educating adult learners, and student characteristics/classifications) and professionals (faculty characteristics/issues).

Although not an issue of primary focus for many of the *JDE* interviews (see the macro

theme analysis), nearly half of the interviews—regardless of the interviewee's role—indicated the importance of diversity through some secondary conversation thread. Indeed the largest micro theme was diversity of students, including changing student populations, with 30 of the 76 interviews having some secondary focus on diversity.

The other four themes in this grouping were not nearly as large with affective issues ( $n = 9$ ), educating adult learners ( $n = 7$ ), faculty characteristics/issues ( $n = 12$ ), and students' characteristics/classifications ( $n = 11$ ) as secondary emphases. However, we find it notable, and perhaps reflective of the spirit of the field, that, taken as a whole, a large majority of *JDE* interviews focused on the people of developmental education.

**Praxis.** In the grouping we called praxis, we included, generally, themes that emphasized the work that is done related to developmental education. This included the following six micro themes: assessment and testing, curriculum and pedagogy, instruction and instructional models, learning styles, learning theory, and other programmatic models or developmental education alternatives.

The third-largest across all micro themes in terms of frequency was the micro theme of assessment (testing and outcomes) with 25 interviews touching upon that topic in some way. Across the years, this topic was raised fairly consistently following the first emergence in 1981 through the most recent in 2013. Given the prevalence of assessment as an ongoing topic in the field's literature, we were not surprised to notice this significant trend.

Next was instruction and instructional models with 17. This group included specific models such as a Jungian model of instruction [Spann, 1990] as well as more general models such as a learner-centered model [Lowman, 1986]. As well, curriculum and pedagogy had 13 interviews with such a secondary focus, and there were 15 interviews associated with other programmatic models, and 12 associated with learning theory. Learning styles had only six, and most of these (with one exception in 2009) were published early on in *JDE*'s history. This does not surprise us, especially given recent scholarship that questions the soundness of such approaches (i.e., Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008).

It does not surprise us that so many interviews, cumulatively, across the 39 years of *JDE*, focused on praxis. It is, after all, the work of developmental education that has served as the impetus of so much of what has been showcased in *JDE* over the years.

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**Professionalization of the field.** The final grouping contained only four micro themes, but the largest total number of interviews. Professionalization of the field includes history; professional organizations; research and methodologies; and training, professional development, and credentialing.

The second-largest category of all the micro code themes was training, professional development, and credentialing with 27 interviews having some secondary discussion on the faculty and staff preparation. Research and methodologies related to the scholarship of developmental education was a topic in 15 interviews. Professional organizations, including discussions surrounding organizations such as ACCESS Europe [Woodrow, 1992], the League for Innovation [O'Banion, 1980], and LSCCHE [Sheets, 2016], was a topic touched upon in eight interviews. Finally, the history of the field arose as a secondary thread in six interviews over the years.

## Discussion

This research documents the contents of a component of the *Journal of Developmental Education* across four decades. Such an analysis has practical and scholarly potentials for informing the field's theory, research, and practice.

## Practical and Scholarly Uses

First, scholars and doctoral students who are developing historical analyses of particular eras or developing a foundation for a scholarly work or dissertation can use this content analysis to identify the trends and issues that were of interest to the field at any particular time throughout the past 40 years in the history of developmental education. More so, this work provides a lens by which scholars might observe across time how specific topics and issues emerged, evolved, transformed, and even ceased to hold importance to the field.

The macro themes that were identified suggest those content areas that were of broad importance to the field or at least the editors of *JDE* felt that they should be of import. Yet, it was determined through the content analysis process that, simply focusing on macro themes did not bring to the surface numerous topics within each interview that were subordinate micro themes to the superordinate macro themes. By focusing on a micro theme the researcher can determine the full importance and even lifespan of a particular area of interest emerging in and across multiple interviews.

A thorough review of the literature across the past two decades shows that researchers in the field have undertaken a limited number of

content analyses compared to earlier decades. Secondly, then, this content analysis serves as a model for researchers who desire to conduct both theory and research driven current era or cross-generational content analyses of scholarly journals and texts as well as instructional materials. Utilizing a content analysis model with its attention to participants, layered themes, and methodological principles, we are able to determine if there exists within or across textual sources or media an interaction between theory, basic research, applied research, and praxis. We are thus able to answer the question posed by Stahl, Hynd, and Brozo (1990): "Are research findings eventually translated into instructional methods found within texts, or are the texts slaves to tradition?"

Third, data from this content analysis can be used as a component for the in-depth review of literature that should accompany research and policy reports as well as literature review section of a thesis or a dissertation. Though such litera-

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*By focusing on a micro theme the researcher can determine the full importance and even lifespan of a particular area of interest.*

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ture reviews are not necessarily thorough in the identification of theoretical or research bases of a topic, they are generally creditable when found in high impact journals or the product of a rigorous doctoral dissertation process. Still ever so many literature reviews regularly overlook the human component as found in this content analysis of a power elite in developmental education or kindred fields. It is of importance to include the human voice(s) as it analyzes or advocates a particular trend or issue. As individuals advocate for certain positions professionals learn how theory and/or research is either used or misused as it transitions to policy and practice.

Finally, we must acknowledge that historical context matters. Indeed, the authors argue that the *JDE* interviews can be used for research purposes and historical understanding only if the interviews are contextualized. It is important to know if education was in an era of increased or decreased enrollment, if state funding was higher or lower, and so on when analyzing the content of the interviews. In light of this, a suggestion for future research is to look at different reform movements in developmental education

and overlay the movements and *JDE* interview macro/micro themes.

## Limitations and Delimitations

Context matters, especially as it relates to a content analysis. Hence, the codes, macro and micro themes, and categorization of all of these throughout our analysis of 39 volumes of *JDE* interviews may have been categorized differently in another time in the field's history. This is, of course, not necessarily a limitation of the study's design, but rather of the nature of historical research. Next, the content analysis is solely of interviews and does not, by design, consider the influence of other editorial content on interview selection. The absence of context in relation to overall editorial content may represent another limitation or delimiting characteristic of this research. Thus, it should be noted that additional analyses—of a comparative nature—might be useful to examine specific topics in terms of coverage within the *JDE* overall. And, finally, this article reports only on two aspects of the research undertaken; due to limited print space additional analyses on the professional roles of interviewers and interviewees is not included.

## Conclusion

It is important to note that these interviews cannot be seen as history but rather as products with implications for history. They are responses to impactful theories, research, issues, and trends. But, they have been identified generally through the filter of an editorial staff. In some ways, then, the *JDE* editorial staff, including the Board of Editors, oft times has taken on the role of a benevolent parent or Dutch uncle, deciding what issues were of primary import at any given time, what viewpoints and perspectives the members of the field should be cognizant of, and what sorts of personal and professional development should be explored. This research methodology is, by its very nature, a classification, an analysis, and a reaction to identified content pertaining to trends and issues within various eras as opposed to more typical author-driven articles that focus on theory, research, or praxis. Nonetheless, for virtually every journal in the education field, the editorial staff and the editorial review board serve in a type of benevolent if not parental role of stewardship for the respective field: offering up what is good or healthy or nutritious—in this case, in the form of four decades of *JDE* interviews—for the developmental education professional.

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Note: A bibliography including full citation for all interviews is posted at [www.ncde.appstate.edu](http://www.ncde.appstate.edu) on the Publications page along with tables of the macro and micro themes. 

