Examining Communities of Practice: Transdisciplinarity, Resilience, and Professional Identity

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ABSTRACT: This article examines transdisciplinarity in developmental education and Basic Writing in the context of externally-driven developmental education reforms. We report on a pilot study survey of 143 developmental educators regarding their professional identity, engagement, and resilience. Respondents identified professional roles and interactions with colleagues as central to conceptualizations of their practice and community. Respondents reported maintaining professional resilience through connections with students, colleagues, and their sense of agency. Despite the importance respondents placed upon connections with practitioners and their recognition of the transdisciplinary nature of their work as professionals, findings indicate limited awareness of the transdisciplinary nature of the community of developmental educators. Implications are discussed for widening developmental educators' community of practice to connect practitioners from diverse fields, professions, and institutional contexts. Future directions are discussed for developing teacher-scholars' types and levels of resilience for the purpose of exercising a voice in national debates about developmental education reform.

KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; community of practice; developmental education; professional identity, resilience; transdisciplinary

The two recent special issues on graduate education in Basic Writing in the *Journal of Basic Writing* point to enduring trends in the profession that deserve attention and research. In her article, "Faculty Development

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and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty: Finding and Enacting a Professional Identity in Basic Writing," Karen Uehling writes, "Perhaps the factor that has most influenced my recent thinking about faculty development and graduate courses is the almost impossible challenge for Basic Writing faculty to find and enact a professional identity" (66). We agree. In the present context of externally-driven education reform efforts, professional identity, engagement in the profession and discipline, and resilient practices faculty develop to sustain their work are of vital importance. Laura Gray-Rosendale, the special editor for these two issues, writes, "the main theme of [the second] issue is professionalization in graduate education" (2). In this article, we seek to look beyond the important topic of professionalization in graduate programs to understand developmental educators' sense of professional identity, engagement in the field and discipline, and how teacher-scholars in these contexts become resilient and sustain their practice.

Our article reports and interprets the results from a survey of 143 developmental educators. We identified respondents' professional roles and interactions with colleagues and asked about their sense of agency. While the study draws from a large number of developmental educators, we present our work as a pilot study, based upon our recognition of a low response rate and the respondent pool's limited representation of adjunct and contingent faculty. Despite these limits, we argue that our findings suggest a need for transdisciplinary awareness in the Basic Writing and developmental educator communities of practice. In other words, we call for an understanding of Basic Writing as existing within the context of developmental education specifically, and higher education more broadly. Moreover, we discuss implications for developing teacher-scholars' types and levels of resilience, especially in the face of national, often top-down education reforms.

In our study, we specifically looked at developmental education as a whole. This lens may seem an odd fit for the *Journal of Basic Writing*, but we don't think so. When national discussions around "remedial" education occur, they are often aimed at developmental education as a whole. By siloing out Basic Writing, we lose the opportunity for knowledge-sharing and solidarity with professionals facing the same pressures across artificial disciplinary and institutional divides. As Uehling argues, "To strengthen our sense of identity, we might begin by building connections among our diverse current and potential Basic Writing instructors. We need the voices of those from many academic backgrounds to describe how they were drawn

to this work, how they pursued a professional identity, and the kinds of bridges they see or have constructed from their original discipline to Basic Writing" (58). This point is important, and we argue that this vision must be advanced. To be effective in developing a sustainable professional identity and to serve our students, we must undertake a transdisciplinary approach to developmental education as a whole or risk falling victim to Susan Naomi Bernstein's warning in the special issue that "Under no circumstances should the reading be narrowed to Writing Studies, or to the emergent field of Basic Writing Studies. Writing Studies and Basic Writing Studies, in their attempts to professionalize, systemize, and codify our discipline, often reify the systemic hierarchies that stigmatize placement in Basic Writing as a potentially permanent marginalized status" (11). Like Bernstein (*Teaching Developmental Writing*), we contend that Basic Writing is part of the transdisciplinary profession of developmental education, whose professional development is both under-theorized and under-supported. Indeed, rather than examining just Basic Writing or Writing Studies, we must adopt a wider lens to be effective as a profession that serves students.

Transdisciplinarity may be unfamiliar to some readers. It is usually thought of as a research strategy that brings together groups from across disciplines to work on a systemic research problem (Bernstein). We apply it to the disciplines and communities of practice that make up developmental education, contributing to what Christie Toth, Brett Griffiths, and Kathryn Thirolf refer to as "acts of translation characteriz[ing] a distinctive mode of professional engagement [called] *transdisciplinary cosmopolitanism*, an inclusive and pragmatic approach to accessing research and practice that is uniquely suited to two-year college English faculty's professional roles" (94). In fact, we believe that Barbara Gleason in "Forming Adult Educators: The CCNY MA in Language and Literacy" makes a similar argument for the transdisciplinary nature of our work. Gleason explains:

> In presenting the MA in Language and Literacy as a model, we recommend that other graduate program administrators, faculty, and students consider expanding curricula to include a blend of adult learning, TESOL, language studies, composition and rhetoric, and Basic Writing studies. We also recommend that graduate programs consider expanding program missions to include forming educators for multiple professional pathways rather than focusing on one or even two professional careers. (86)

In a graduate program model meant to address systemic problems of adult literacy education, Gleason describes five disciplines working in concert to prepare pre-professionals for work in the field. Other scholars have similarly embraced a transdisciplinary lens for viewing its work and potential across two-year college literature. For instance, in "Who is the Basic Writer? Reclaiming a Foundational Question for Graduate Students, New Teachers, and Emerging Scholars," Hope Parisi explains:

> While macro-reflections of Basic Writing have filtered my perceptions of the field for quite some time, I did not realize the extent to which intersections with policy in the scholarship were peopled with so many research-smart social science professionals, voicing many similar concerns. Some of these scholars are familiar to us, such as Hunter Boylan and Vincent Tinto; and others less so. And the extent to which many of our comp-rhet, community college scholar-colleagues have been optimizing this research toward reform proves its relevance to the work of the two-year college "teacher, scholar, activist" (Sullivan "The Two-Year College")." (121)

Another example of transdisciplinarity might be identified in a recent shift in organizational nomenclature—from the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) to the National Organization of Student Success (NOSS). This change highlights an existential rift between the ways educators approach teaching and the ways outcomes of that teaching are measured, but it also looks to a transdisciplinary approach—including advising and several academic disciplines to address a systemic problem—namely, the success of underprepared students. However, this name change also exemplifies developmental educators' struggle to establish a professional identity during a time when remedial courses and placement assessment are under sustained scrutiny by organizations such as Complete College America and MDRC (an organization that used to be called Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation but which officially changed its name to its acronym in the early 2000's).

In the face of such criticism and the widespread reduction or elimination of developmental education, such as in Florida and North Carolina (Levine-Brown and Anthony), close examination of developmental education practitioners' preparation, professional identity, and resiliency of practice becomes increasingly important (Boylan and Bonham). Existing research on developmental education focuses almost exclusively on out-

comes (e.g., retention or student success) of developmental educators' work without examining developmental educators themselves as mechanisms for facilitating that success. Despite developmental education's long-standing roots of promoting educational access, research on the professional identities of developmental educators who engage in that vital work remains underexplored (Suh). The two special issues of *JBW* centering on graduate education examine how preparation forms professional identity. This focus is important, but a coterminous examination of ongoing professionalization and identity in the field is necessary. In this piece, we bring a social sciences orientation to our examination of the professional identity Basic Writing instructors have as transdisciplinary developmental educators.

A limited sense of shared professional identity harms developmental educators' resilience, or ability to remain strong in the face of professional challenges (Jensen and Suh). The present pilot study examines how developmental educators define their professional identity, including the ways they engage in and remain resilient in their work, and their goals.

EXPLORING DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATORS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Limited previous research has surveyed developmental educators regarding their perceptions of their roles within the field. Eric Paulson, for example, reported on the perceptions of recognized "leaders in the field" who were surveyed for their judgments about whether certain topics were "on" or "off the radar screen" (i.e., relevant to the field) and whether those topics should be on or off ("Developmental Education Radar: 2013" 36). However, the unit of analysis for both the survey's first (Paulson "Developmental Education Radar: 2011") and second iteration (Paulson "Developmental Education Radar: 2013") was specific topics in developmental education, and respondents were chosen based upon their status as recognized leaders within the field. As a result, the radar surveys provide limited insight into the "rank and file" of developmental practitioners. Similarly, a survey of interviews published in the *Journal of Developmental Education* illustrated the emergent interest about professional identity among recognized leaders within the field (Stahl et al.). Additionally, research on the practitioner perspective of "what effective teaching means" (Abbate-Vaughn and Paugh 16) and the development of educators' professional identities rarely consider developmental educators' sense of identity or their ability to persist in the field (see also Busey and Waters; Kenny et al.).

Disciplinary research from two-year college writing studies has included Basic Writing instructors, who are themselves a specific subset of developmental education practitioners. Based on their survey of Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) members, Christie Toth and Patrick Sullivan concluded that English departmental scholarship practices must move away from individual to department- or college-wide efforts. The authors identified this shift as a move toward local teacher-scholar communities of practice, which they define as "a professional model in which scholarly engagement becomes an integral part of a department's teaching and administrative work" (248). Toth and Sullivan's work is part of a larger trend, spanning the last fifteen years, in two-year college English scholarship to reconfigure the identity of two-year college English teachers, including their preparation, engagement in the field, and engagement with scholarship (Andelora "Teacher/Scholar/Activist"; Jensen and Toth; Jensen et al., 2018; Calhoon-Dillahunt et al.; Sullivan "Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar-Activist"). However, the available research has not examined practitioner perspectives within a comprehensive view of developmental education as a field which transcends disciplinary and professional boundaries, such as developmental mathematics, developmental literacy, advising, and tutoring. Such a collective view of developmental education might be established within a community of practice frame (Lave and Wenger).

The existing literature on developmental education as a larger field also has not examined how developmental educators engage in a community of practice. Lynn Reid touches on this in the recent special issue *JBW* in her article "Disciplinary Reading in Basic Writing Graduate Education: The Politics of Remediation in *JBW*, 1995-2015," where she argues that "job market preparation and teaching practicums alone are inadequate preparation for the 'future tense' of professional work that practitioners in Basic Writing might face" (8).

We seek to understand the lived experience of Reid's future tense. Without this understanding, we, as a field, are unclear about how we can establish and maintain our professional identity and connections, our goals, or our resilience. Understanding these aspects of the developmental educator community of practice is of vital importance to our collective ability to respond effectively to external pressures, maintain a resilient field, and to serve our students who are often vulnerable.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore whether developmental educators currently engage in a community of practice, this study reports on the following questions:

1. What factors do developmental educators include in their professional identity?
2. How do developmental educators describe their professional identity?
3. How do developmental educators enact or experience professional resilience?
4. With whom do developmental educators connect as they engage in their work?
5. What goals do developmental educators hold for their work?

Given that the current conversation around developmental education centers on elimination, reduction, and instrumentalization in a context of austerity, we must understand our identity and community of practice to survive and serve our students. These questions identify and interrogate aspects of professional identity for Basic Writing instructors and developmental education practitioners as articulated by the literature (see Toth and Sullivan; Griffiths and Jensen; Jensen and Toth: Griffiths: Gleason). Moreover, the lack of previous research on developmental educators' professional identity demands further investigation. We designed the present study as a pilot for a larger inquiry. For this portion, we surveyed widely from various national professional organizations that engage developmental educators.

Definitions and Theoretical Framing

Operationally, we define professional identity as professional self-concept grounded in the educator's values, training, motivation, experience, talents, and professionalization (Griffiths; Toth et al. "Distinct and Significant"). Educators' professional identity is essential to a field's professional autonomy, or professionals' level of control related to their professional identity in personal, institutional, and regional areas. This professional identity draws from teacher-scholars' abilities to enact their own professional autonomy and epistemological authority (Griffiths; Larson; Sarfatti Larson). A lack of professional identity can negatively affect teacher-scholars' resilience, or their ability to remain strong in the face of change, high teaching loads, and more (Suh and Jensen). In contrast, fostering a strong

professional identity has implications for student success, teaching excellence, and professional engagement (Griffiths and Jensen). Further, student success has been observed as a central component to conceptualizations of professional identity in discipline-specific studies of developmental educators (Diaz; Khoule et al.; Severs). A shared professional identity is central to a group's community of practice.

Integral to both professional identity and the professional community of practice is the notion of professional resilience. Broadly defined, resilience is the ability to withstand shock or change and can be examined through discrete lenses. For our work, we follow Griffiths and Jensen who define three types of resilience: individual, psycho-social, and design (Griffiths and Jensen). Individual resilience is a characteristic of a single individual responding to stressors in her environment (Griffiths and Jensen; Rutter). Psychosocial resilience refers to "a dynamic psycho-social process which protects a group of individuals from the potential negative effects of stressors they collectively encounter" (Morgan et al. 552). Griffiths and Jensen explain that "seen this way, individual behaviors can contribute to (or detract from) the resiliency of the group or team" (302). Commitment to a common goal shared within the community supports individuals' resilience, or ability to bounce back from stress (Griffiths and Jensen). Griffiths and Jensen draw on the concept of design resilience from architecture, too. This concept of resilience examines how structures or systems are built to withstand environmental stress. This model may be applied to departmental, professional, or institutional structures and systems.

Communities of practice describe a group of people who share a craft or profession and a commitment to a common goal. Gray-Rosendale in her recent *JBW* editor's column argues that now is a "pivotal time [. . .] in our changing landscape of Basic Writing history, theory, and practice" (2). To understand that landscape, we must seek a clear definition and scope of our community of practice. We employ Lave and Wenger's definition of a community of practice as having a domain, a community, and a practice. A community of practice is an occupational group wherein newcomers are mentored into more central roles by members of longer standing. This mentoring constructs not only the newcomer's membership but their identity, too. Through their shared identity, community members work towards common goals. Research on postsecondary educators' professional engagement is often framed through Lave and Wenger's theory of communities of practice (Gehrke and Kezar; Smith et al.). Researchers have documented, for example, how developmental educators across disciplinary traditions and

professional roles share the goal of student success (Boylan "Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students"; Casazza "Strengthening Practice"; Diaz; Khoule et al.; Severs).

We therefore apply a community of practice (Lave and Wenger) theoretical framework in this pilot study, arguing the community's domain as developmental education, in national groups like NOSS, the Council on Basic Writing (CBW), the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA), and CRLA, as well local groups as discrete as a faculty community or department; and our shared practice as the work of developmental education, which we see as broadly conceived across disciplines. In the present study, we apply this framework to deepen our exploration of the connections between developmental educators and to explore if and how developmental educators share a sense of professional identity, engagement, and resiliency.

However, what constitutes the community of practice for the professional identity of developmental educators, and its intersection with Basic Writing, is often absent from discussions of developmental education models and teaching (Arendale; Boylan "Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students"; Parker et al.; Smittle). In fact, while developmental education has been looked at in parts (i.e., math faculty, literacy, or student support), a holistic view of the community of practice for developmental educators—and particularly the role of Basic Writing within this community—is absent from the literature. In graduate preparation for Basic Writing, Reid finds a similar absence, noting, "though practitioners in Basic Writing studies often refer to 'the politics of remediation,' there are few pedagogical models that address how to teach this facet of professional life to graduate students and emerging professionals" (6). Systemic investigation across the transdisciplinary communities of developmental education is vital if we wish to move beyond lore and to sustainable resilient communities of practice.

Instrument

Data from this pilot study were collected through adaptation of Toth and Sullivan's survey for Two-Year College Association (TYCA) members. Because the original survey intended to measure the professional engagement and resiliency only of two-year college English faculty, some of the language was modified in the instrument to reflect a wider range of professional organizations and to collect additional professional demographic information. We intended that the survey instrument's increased scope would help in theorizing the transdisciplinary community in developmental education.

In addition to the established survey items in this pilot study, respondents were asked to list their institutional roles (e.g., Advisor, Counselor, Learning/Writing Center professional, Testing Center Professional, and Math Instructor), and their membership within Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) organizations.

Our resulting developmental education practitioner survey totaled eighteen items: seven Likert or multiple choice and eleven open-ended items. Multiple-choice items included organizational membership information, conference attendance, and frequency/type of professional development engagement. Open-ended items solicited respondents' opinions and experiences related to engagement with other professionals, accessing research and scholarship, and areas of developmental education engagement. Content validity of the survey instrument was established by consulting with members of the NADE board and close adherence to the topics of the original survey instrument (Toth and Sullivan). Despite being a potential methodological limit to the study, the small sample size from our low response rate coupled with the vocabularies of the different disciplinary and professional organizations allowed us to capture initial data which can serve as a foundation for further questions and larger studies.

Preliminary results were presented at a session during the 2019 National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) conference. Session attendees reported seeing and responding to the survey and confirmed our analysis. In response to the survey, one attendee noted that the current perception of developmental education in his state of Mississippi "perpetuates a symbiotic isolationism between students and developmental educators" and the rest of the institution, whereby developmental education is considered separate from, and therefore a barrier to, students' success within the college. This reported perception of developmental educators as existing outside of the student support community of practice further illustrated the need for developmental educators' active engagement in establishing a cohesive identity for their profession and professional practices.

Respondents

The survey was sent to NADE (now NOSS) members via a Facebook post on the NADE page and a link in the 2018 national conference Guidebook app. The survey was open for two weeks following the 2018 NADE conference; the survey was also sent to the Developmental Math Community of the Association of Mathematics at the Two-Year College for two weeks

during their annual conference. In order to extend the representativeness of the sample to encompass a variety of institutional roles and disciplines, a link to the survey was posted on listservs for LRNASST-L (a primary means of communication for CRLA members), the Council for Basic Writing (703 members), the Two-Year College Association (624 members), and the Developmental Mathematics Community of the Association for Mathematics in the Two-Year College with 400 members (Paula Wilhite, e-mail message to the author, January 18, 2019). At the time of distribution, NADE had 2,366 members (Annette Cook, e-mail message to the author, January 24, 2019) and the LRNASST-L had approximately 2,200 members (Winne Cooke, e-mail message to the author, January 18, 2019). The survey was completed by 143 developmental education professionals.

Demographic data collection was limited to encourage respondent participation. However, relevant characteristics emerged from respondents' answers to the items, including the number who identified as fulfilling different developmental practitioner roles (see Table 1; role counts exceed sample size because respondents could identify multiple roles).

Table 1. Self-Identified Roles

Developmental Educator Role(s)	Respondents
Writing/IRW Instructor	71
Math Instructor	33
Reading Instructor	31
Advisor	27
Learning/Writing Center Professional	24
ESOL/ESL Instructor	10
Administrator	9
Counselor	4
FYC Professor	1
Learning Center Instructor	1
Testing Center Professional	1

These responses indicated the overlapping nature of many practitioners' work. For example, all four respondents who identified as Counselors listed additional roles; seven of the nine Administrators listed other roles. Among Learning/Writing Center Professionals, eighteen out of twenty-four respondents listed additional roles including Advisor, Testing Center Professional, Administrator, and Reading or Writing/IRW instructor.

As a group, the 143 respondents claimed a cumulative total of 250 advanced degrees in a total of ten fields, including education (74 advanced degrees), English (62), Reading/Literacy (28), Mathematics (26), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (14), and Counseling (11), among others. In total, respondents reported holding 187 master's degrees and 63 doctorate degrees. Based upon the survey distribution methods, we posit that respondents represented a highly engaged portion of the transdisciplinary developmental educator community. However, respondents were not limited to those who could afford to engage through conference attendance. Although neither the CRLA nor CBW listservs require active membership in their affiliated professional organization, 126/143 (88.1%) of total respondents reported being members of professional organizations, and 128/143 (89.5%) reported participating in at least one conference during the previous year. The range of professional memberships and conferences attended speaks to sample diversity: four respondents listed membership in four international organizations (one per respondent), and the sample included members of 25 national organizations with a focus on two-year colleges, higher education, administration, tutoring, counseling/advising, multicultural education, disciplinary knowledge, or learning support.

Data Analysis

Open-ended item responses were coded through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke), which is particularly useful for analyzing survey data since it allows researchers to examine emergent themes which were not present in the survey questions (Tanaka et al.). Responses to each open-ended item were combined, and the researchers independently coded for broad, inductive themes and then more specific themes within the codes aided by Dedoose qualitative analysis software. A single utterance (i.e., response phrase) could yield multiple tokens (i.e., portion of the response invoking a specific code), so the total number of codes was greater than the number of respondents (i.e., there were 226 tokens resulting from the survey prompt to define "Community of Practice"; total sample size n = 143). After this

independent coding, the researchers cross-checked tokens for each code, calculating inter-rater reliability by dividing the number of matches by the number of independently assigned codes. The inter-rater reliability for this item was 0.90 (202 matches of 226 codes initially), and the researchers reworked codes until all discrepancies were resolved.

FINDINGS

In conducting this pilot study, we cast an intentionally wide net across professional organizations. We begin by discussing how respondents conceptualized their professional identities and then introduce findings related to their connections to other developmental educators, resilience, and goals.

Professional Identity

Similar to the literature describing the comprehensiveness of developmental education (Casazza "Harvard Symposium 2000"), respondents reported a variety of components to their definition of a developmental education practitioner. Notably, three respondents rejected the label "practitioner." One respondent explained,

> With all due respect, the term "practitioner" makes me seem like a medical professional, which then seems to associate me with the "medical model" or the "deficit model" (or "remedial model") of Developmental Education, wherein a student has a disease or a deficit which needs to be "cured" or "fixed" or "remediated." So, in essence, I object to the use of this term to describe developmental-education educators.

Because of space constraints, table 2 reports only the three most prevalent dominant themes and the three most frequent corresponding subthemes, e.g., content area, students, andragogy/pedagogy. For example, see table 2. [Credentials/Formal] Training Knowledge of is a dominant theme as it was mentioned in 230 tokens. But this is made discrete in the subthemes where we note three groupings from this larger category.

Italicization denotes *in vivo* code, or a code derived from a direct quote.

However, the majority of respondents (121/143) accepted or positively responded to the term "practitioner." Most frequently, respondents defined practitioners based upon specific forms of required Training or Knowledge of, frequently related to the *Content Area*: "For example, a writing center practi-

Table 2. Themes for Developmental Education Practitioners

Dominant Themes	Subthemes
[Credentials/Formal] *Training, Knowledge* of (230)	Content Area (71)
	Students (58)
	Andragogy/Pedagogy (33)
Action (122)	*Support Focused on Students* (42)
	Constant Cycle of Improvement (23)
	Teaching (23)
Specific Roles (45)	Faculty (25)
	Academic Support e.g., *Tutors, Student Success* (9)
	Administrators (7)

tioner would have done research in writing center praxis and theory before taking on that job." As the respondent indicates, practitioners were often defined based upon *Actions* associated with their practice (122/436). Perhaps because of the multiple roles many respondents held at their institutions, not all respondents defined practitioners within narrow disciplinary confines. In fact, two respondents specifically identified practitioners as working beyond a single discipline, such as the respondent who noted, "'Transdisciplinary cosmopolitanism' is a fair way to capture what a developmental educator often does in terms of training." Although these definitions suggest developmental educators' professionalization and sense of professional identity, respondents did not indicate a sense of a shared identity as developmental education practitioners whose practice collectively transcends disciplinary boundaries. Instead, respondents who specifically defined their work in this way identified themselves in ways which did not suggest their recognition of

a strong collective identity with others who share in this transdisciplinary work beyond their institutional contexts.

Connections Between Developmental Educators

Although respondents' definitions of developmental education practitioners suggested the absence of a clearly articulated developmental educator identity, open-item responses illustrated the complex and nuanced ways in which developmental educators viewed themselves as connected to others. In response to the three open-ended items asking respondents to define their community of practice, and what a practitioner is, and to describe how they remain resilient, respondents discussed the importance of *Colleagues/Coworkers* (53), *Conferences* (24), *Scholars/Scholarship* (14), and *Mentor(s)* (8). The high rate of respondents' professional membership (126) and conference attendance (114), which respondents often reported as not being supported by their institutions, may be indicative of the respondents' efforts to connect to other professionals—even at personal financial cost.

Over one-third (58) of the respondents identified as belonging to a community of practice in response to the open-ended item asking, "How do you define your community of practice?" Primarily, they defined their community of practice based upon institutional Roles (51) and interactions with *Colleagues* (51; to reiterate, *italics* indicates *in vivo* code emerging from participant responses) and within various Locations (36) (see table 3).

Because some respondents described multiple aspects of their community of practice, some responses had multiple codes, such as a response which included "Fellow faculty members at my university and faculty across the country." In addition to the dominant theme of Roles, this utterance was coded twice for the dominant theme Location (for *Nation-wide* and *Within My Department*, respectively). As this response illustrates, respondents most frequently defined their community of practice as others who share their specific role(s). Several respondents described the multiple layers of their communities of practice, noting that in addition to departmental or institutional communities' practices, they also participated in communities of practice that transcended geographic or disciplinary boundaries.

Finally, respondents' inclusion of *Scholars* is a noteworthy aspect of how the surveyed respondents conceptualized the developmental education community of practice. Although the phrase "research" is mentioned only nine times in reference to the community of practice, "conferences" are mentioned an additional eight times. As one respondent noted, "My

community of practice includes scholars and practitioners (faculty, staff, students, and administrators) exploring postsecondary reading and learning support." These comments illustrate the central role scholarship holds, specifically within the developmental education community of practice for the surveyed practitioners. These responses and the ten mentions of fellow *Scholars* as a subtheme within *Colleagues* echo Toth and Sullivan's efforts to "consciously cultivate local teacher scholar communities of practice, a model in which scholarly engagement becomes an integral part of a department's teaching and administrative work" (248). Indeed, the responses suggest that the teacher preparation sought by Reid must include an explicit connection to scholarship not just about Basic Writing but also the field of developmental education writ large and its applications to supporting and sustaining the professional engagement of developmental educators.

Table 3. Developmental Educators' Community of Practice

Dominant Themes	Subthemes
Roles (51 total)	*Faculty* (27)
	Academic Support, i.e. *tutors, staff* (17)
	Advisors, *counselors* (7)
Colleagues (49)	*Colleagues* (22)
	Professional Organization (17)
	Scholars (10)
Location (34)	*Community College* (18)
	Nationwide (9)
	Within My Department (7)

Resilience

Respondents most frequently referenced *Students* (63) in their discussions of resilience. Subthemes within the dominant theme of *Students* varied between advocating for students regarding issues of *Access* (18) and *Working. . . in Collectivity with Students* (12), such as by "getting to know my students as individuals, letting them tell me their story, and then, together, devising a plan for academic improvement/success." The dominant theme *Connect with Colleagues* (51) was another common way the surveyed developmental educators reported remaining resilient, such as the practitioner who described "surrounding myself with colleagues and mentors who challenge me to stretch myself and by considering new pedagogical practices when I feel I've hit a wall." Importantly, although this response contained a psycho-social component, it—and others like it—did not meet our definition of psycho-social resilience because it did not contribute to the group's ability to respond to collectively experienced stressors (Morgan). In fact, responses frequently highlighted the importance of individual agency, which could be seen in other dominant themes such as *I Believe in What I'm Doing* (26), *Reflecting on My Own Practice* (13), and *Autonomy* (5). As one respondent noted, "I view developmental education as the most important component of higher ed when it comes to social justice, the American Dream. The importance of the work we do keeps me resilient."

Despite the hopeful tone of most responses, several respondents noted the challenge of remaining resilient: "I keep going because I have amazing colleagues who want good things for our students, too, but I find myself inching more and more toward the 'jaded' side of teaching every semester." The same respondent continued, "This is a sad time for higher education, particularly for those marginalized groups who many of us have dedicated our entire careers toward helping. It feels bleak." The respondent's language echoed the sentiments of others who described similar challenges in persevering against austerity measures to eliminate developmental courses and limit other services for students enrolled there. Respondents frequently cited colleagues, within and across campus and professional organizations, as inspiration during these troubling times.

Goals

Working toward shared goals is a theoretical condition of the community of practice (Griffiths and Jensen; Lave and Wenger). Respondents described their community of practice based on a *Goal(s)* or action to be

accomplished in 31 utterances. For example, one respondent noted, "My community is a body of professionals whose *goal* is to prepare students for curriculum courses while staying up to date with the latest tools and strategies in our field." The respondent's use of "professionals" suggests the respondents' transdisciplinary understanding of developmental education as a field which encompasses several disciplines and institutional roles. Respondents described *Goal*(*s*) in their definition of developmental education practitioners and as necessary to their resilience.

The survey results illustrated how respondents in this pilot study held similar goals and overlapping roles, which some respondents specifically identified as "transdisciplinary" in reference to the ways their work transcended disciplinary boundaries. Additionally, a few respondents described the importance of multilayered communities of practice and the role of researchers/scholars in those communities. Respondents, as a whole, however, demonstrated limited recognition that other developmental educators shared experiences and hopes for the impact of their work. Thus, the responses suggested an emergent but limited shared professional identity for the field of developmental educators, and as a result, the relationships that many described cultivating with other practitioners did not meet the definition of psychosocial resilience for a community of developmental educators.

LIMITS

Measures of quality for survey results usually include response rate and representativeness (Fincham). The present pilot study's number of respondents is but a small portion of the membership of any particular developmental education-related organization. Of the CLADEA organizations, only NADE/NOSS and CRLA provided venues for sharing the survey. Only 36/2,366 (1.5%) of NADE/NOSS members completed the survey, and the researchers' own narrow disciplinary identities as developmental literacy/ English faculty may have further limited access to discipline-specific communities which serve developmental educators outside of the CLADEA umbrella. Finally, this study does not examine specific issues related to the community of practice or professional identity of contingent and part-time faculty. It is estimated that these practitioners make up at least half of postsecondary faculty in the U.S. (AAUP, n.d.; National Center for Education Statistics) and whose exploitation and lack of resources (Kahn et al.) compound the issues examined in this study. Although these limits prevent the authors from generalizing the findings to the larger community of developmental

educators, this pilot study offers a first of its kind examination of how the surveyed developmental educators make meaning of their professional work as transcending disciplinary boundaries.

NAMING WHAT WE NEED

Below we discuss three ramifications from the findings: the need for transdisciplinary identity in developmental education and Basic Writing, a shared sense of community of practice as an antidote to siloed disciplines and professions, and attention to a community of practice model as a means toward establishing a more resilient profession.

Transdisciplinary Identity. This pilot study indicates that the responding developmental educators conceptualized themselves as discipline-specific practitioners based upon their disciplinary training and practices (i.e., running a learning support center). Respondents maintained and drew support from other developmental educators who shared their institution or subject matter. In fact, several respondents described their practice as grounded in what might be represented as overlapping circles of department, institution, discipline, and field—what one respondent described as "a vast community of practice with different layers." However, even this respondent described the outermost layers, which included membership in national associations, as being a discipline-specific community of practice. As a whole, respondents suggested important, but limited, awareness of the transdisciplinarity of their work and the potential for their communities of practice to transcend institutional boundaries or job titles given their shared goal of student success and their shared practices of drawing from a belief in their work and connections with colleagues to establish and maintain resilience.

A Sense of Community. Despite the preponderance of respondents' self-defined discipline-specific roles, a limited but important group of respondents recognized the transdisciplinarity of their work. In response to the open-ended item about under-researched areas in developmental education, one respondent noted the need for

> Cross-disciplinary training and the failure, at times, for disciplinary silos to share information (so developmental instructors involved in NADE may not be talking to the Council on Basic Writing within the CCCCs [Conference on College Composition and Communication], and neither may be drawing from research from CRLA or TESOL, both of which have rich research histories).

We concur with this respondent and others, arguing the need for scholarship exploring how to create a stronger sense of collective identity based upon developmental educators' shared professional label and goals. This shared professional identity would allow developmental educators to band together across disciplinary divides to better enact their mission of student success, to advocate for their students and their profession, and to strengthen their sense of professional resilience in the face of external reform pressures. We see this need to broaden the field and scholarship as engaging with Reid's findings that

> Within *JBW*, there are clear patterns in the way that authors recount stories about facing the politics of remediation: state legislators and administrators are evil and greedy; institutions enact disembodied policies; the general public fails to understand the work of Basic Writing; and Basic Writing experts are stalwarts of social justice working against these difficult odds. (28)

Reid claims for Basic Writing a transdisciplinary *ethos* in seeking to move graduate education "beyond close reading of a few scenarios and instead read across texts to locate patterns that might help us to strategically position our work for stakeholders we may have forgotten or opportunities we may not have considered" (27).

Community of Practice as Model. We see the community of practice model as a way forward to establish and strengthen individual, psychosocial, and design resilience of new and veteran developmental educators through national organizations (Jensen and Griffiths). As Toth and Sullivan point out, a focus on "cultivating teacher-scholar communities of practice" may "bring fresh focus and resources" (262) to our efforts. It may be that engagement in establishing a national identity that transcends professional titles will increase psychosocial and design resilience in developmental education. The work of teacher-scholar-activism that refigures two-year college studies as a movement explicitly facing the political realities of education in the 21st century may be such a model. Further, practitioner scholars who share in this transdisciplinary work beyond their institutional contexts may well have better structures in place to support their resilience.

MOVING FORWARD

The results from this pilot survey lead us to ask additional questions as we engage in creating this professional identity and community of practice.

Most notably, we wonder: Is there a community here? What is the value of crafting and sustaining a cohesive transdisciplinary professional identity for developmental educators? What labor, structures, and resources are required if such work is valuable? Should the developmental educator identity be a unifying one despite disciplinary differences?

We believe in the notion of a community of developmental educators, of which Basic Writing is a necessary component, which shares the goal of supporting students' postsecondary success. The findings point to a community in need of additional identification and organization. Findings from a national study of professionals engaged in postsecondary student support and transitions similarly suggest that practitioners most frequently identify as developmental educators, despite their perceptions of attacks on the field (Jensen and Suh). Following this and our pilot study, we believe there is an acknowledged, yet undeveloped, national developmental educator identity that must be strengthened through explicit engagement with a community of practice model.

One way to engage in this work is to build institutional collaborations and transdisciplinarity within and across departments and institutions. Christie Toth, Patrick Sullivan, and Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt point to "cross sector disciplinary alliances that expand educational opportunity, improve professional equity, and advance social justice" (86). Their examination of inter-institutional partnerships is instructive in its explicit negotiations of the ethical work required to work across disciplinary and institutional silos. This type of work, and other partnerships like it (see Suh and Jensen "Building Professional Autonomy"; Uehling) allow for engagement across institutions in equity-centered partnerships (Jensen). Extrapolating this work across disciplines within institutions as developmental educators create a community of practice and articulate solidarity is a logical next step.

We recognize, too, that the instantiation and maintenance of a resilient community of practice will require work with administrators and policy makers. Responses noted a range of areas in which developmental educators' abilities to participate in the community were limited by institutional policies ranging from eliminated conference support to reduced support for professional development. Scholars argue for engagement with administrators "to educate administrators about the disciplinary values and pedagogical excellence we espouse" (Griffiths and Jensen 316). Further, as Jeff Andelora ("Teacher/Scholar/Activist"; "The Teacher/Scholar"; "Forging a National Identity") and Patrick Sullivan ("My English 93 Class"; "The Two-Year College"; *Economic Inequality*) make clear in their conception of the

teacher-scholar-activist identity, the developmental educator community of practice must find ways to engage in public-facing activism; we must have our "house" in order to provide a cogent response to this national moment.

Another issue worth examining is graduate program support. It is necessary to mentor and recruit new members of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger), and this is especially true in developmental education and Basic Writing where so few new members enter the community with formal training in postsecondary student transitions and support. Programs such as the one Gleason describes in "Forming Adult Educators: The CCNY MA in Language and Literacy," which are transdisciplinary and aimed at preparing future professionals rather than replicating old models, are of vital importance. Moreover, we can look to two-year college writing studies which has long looked at how graduate preparation is enacted in the profession and what effect that has. The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) has a series of guidelines which demonstrate the evolution of two-year college writing studies identity (TYCA 2004, 2011), community of practice, and engagement with graduate education. The recent 2015 guidelines (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al.; Jensen and Toth) were accompanied by articles and symposia which explicitly tied graduate educators' responsibilities to helping to foster a resilient profession (Griffiths and Jensen; Suh and Jensen; Jensen and Toth; Toth and Jensen).

This pilot study points to developmental educators having a shared common goal, but not a complete and shared sense of professional identity or systems or schemes in place to create and maintain resilience. These findings signal the field's needs for additional research on how to strengthen a sense of professional identity within a transdisciplinary community of practice and establish resilience for practitioners and the field. We suggest that, with a carefully targeted sample of developmental educators who identify as engaging in and benefiting from their community of practice, future case study research could examine how practitioners connect to each other across disciplinary and institutional silos to establish forms of resilience and ultimately to support students. Most importantly, there is a need to draw from developmental educators as research collaborators in order to answer the questions emerging from this preliminary research about developmental educators. Engaging practitioners is essential to reclaiming the field by engaging in scholarship and public-facing activism, thus contributing to the national conversation by leading discussion on reform by us, for us, with us.

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