Gateways, Not Gatekeepers: Reclaiming the Narrative for Developmental Education

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As scholarship has shown, language and thought are interconnected.

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ABSTRACT: *"Remedial Trap." "Bridge to Nowhere." "Completion Divide." Such language used to describe the field of Developmental Education (DE), especially by those outside the field, is undeniably deficit oriented. In this manuscript, we initiate a dialog that critiques such portrayals of DE, particularly those that appear in key documents that have had great influence on policy and legislation impacting DE. The manuscript is written symposium style, beginning with a coauthored reflection on the current terminology used to shape the narrative of a field, followed by responses by three professionals within the field. Respondents: Darolyn A. Flaggs, Assistant Professor of Education, Kennesaw State University; Michelle A. Francis, Reading Instructor, West Valley College; and Concetta A. Williams, Director of Composition, Chicago State University.*

Within the fields associated with Developmental Education (DE), much attention has been devoted to terminology over the years (e.g., Arendale, 2005; Arendale et al., 2007; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010; Nist, 1984; Rubin, 1991). A glance at the journals and organizations housing these conversations demonstrates that these terminology issues were largely being debated internally within the field as practitioners and scholars strove to identify the most appropriate language to use. Terminology continues to be an important topic in the field; however, what is different now is that such conversations stem from outside of our field, and terminology affects policy and legislation driving the field. We are no longer simply debating the terminology of "remedial" versus "developmental," as this issue goes well beyond disagreements about naming. The issue, rather, is language and the attitudes and assumptions it evokes, as well as the actions and inactions it prompts.

Specific to the fields associated with DE, language still matters: the language we use within the field, and the language used by those outside the field to describe its work, students, and faculty and staff. It matters because, as scholarship has shown, language and thought are interconnected (e.g., Bakhtin, 1934-1935, 1981; Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Indeed, a considerable body of scholarship studies how language influences both thought and action, for instance:

The concepts that govern our thoughts are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3)

Language has power to influence and shape. And particularly when the language used by outsiders to the field is deficit-oriented in nature and is used in ways that shape perceptions about the field, these issues become more urgent than perhaps ever before. Given the context of recent externally driven reforms, professionals in the field must reinvest collective energy in these language conversations in order to reclaim the narrative.

At present, the narrative about DE is largely driven by key research and policy groups such as the Community College Research Center (CCRC), as well as its related centers, the National Center for Postsecondary Research and the Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness, MDRC, and Jobs for the Future (JFF). One of the biggest information sources for current policies and state legislation is Complete College America (CCA), a nonprofit think tank established in 2009. CCA states that it "is a bold national advocate for dramatically increasing college completion rates and closing equity gaps by working with states, systems, institutions, and partners to scale highly effective structural reforms and promote policies that improve student success" (CCA, 2020a). The CCA-state partnerships such as Complete College Georgia, Complete College Tennessee, and Complete College Texas highlight their commitments, and the resultant legislation illustrates their reach.

One of CCA's strategic goals is to "amplify CCA's clear and compelling voice" (CCA, 2020b). That voice, however, presents a discourse of failure used widely to describe remediation and developmental education, for example,

Far too often, today's college students find themselves wandering through their academic experiences, choosing from amongst a

dizzying array of majors, courses, and out-of-classroom learning experiences. While having choices is a good thing, more than a decade of research suggests that too many choices, especially in the absence of adequate information, can have negative effects. At worst, this "paradox of choice" leads to a dead end for students, yielding some college credit but no degree or other credential of value. But even for those who do complete, data reveal that many have swirled, accumulating excess credits, extending their time to degree, and tacking on extra costs in the process. (CCA, 2020c, para. 1)

This language has initiated much concern nationally, resulting in state-level education policy reforms particular to DE. Our purpose is to explore the language shaping perceptions of the field, especially as it is mostly coming from entities outside the field via research reports and other documents. And, given that the CCA organization plays a powerful role as an information source to state policy makers, we chose to examine the language of four CCA-originated documents.

The 2011 CCA report, *Time is the Enemy: The Surprising Truth About Why Today's College Students Aren't Graduating…and What Needs to Change*, attributes to remediation the statistics of low graduation rates. In another of CCA's reports, *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere* (2012), the group reiterates this theme in stronger terms:, which underscores their message that remediation equals failure. In yet another CCA report title, *Promise with a Purpose: College Promise Programs "Built for Completion"* (2018), the use of quotation marks around a key phrase underscores the organization's doubt that DE makes good on its promise to students. Similar implications are evident in the CCA's *Corequisite Remediation: Spanning the Completion Divide* (2016), in which they repurpose the term remediation by connecting it to a new model, corequisite, the organization's solution for what they perceive as the failed, stand-alone DE course model.

Critiquing Deficit and Failure Language

Language such as "Bridge to Nowhere," "A Broken System," "At-risk," and "Remedial," often used to describe DE and its students, is undeniably deficit oriented. Much of this work was initiated by CCA and its predecessor, Getting Past Go (GPG). It is worth noting that it is now difficult to find these CCA reports that were once so widely circulated because there have since been significant changes to the organization's website (from full-text reports to flashy infographics). Because CCA's framework was largely built upon the language of these early reports, though, such language has continued to shape the trajectory and reach of the group's influence.

It should be noted, of course, that the goal-focused language that serves as CCA's vision offers aims that few would challenge:

CCA envisions a nation where all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or familial educational achievement, have equal opportunities to access and complete a college education or credential of value because postsecondary institutions, policy makers, and systems of higher education welcome, invest in, and support these students through and to an on-time completion. (CCA, 2020d, para. 2)

Indeed, the general goal of college completion on its surface is laudable; however, we do challenge CCA's notion of success, their framing of "the problem," and the solutions they offer to boost low graduation rates.

"Reform" as a Result of Terminology

Current national, state, and institutional reforms have roots in CCA ideas, including the national

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reaction to their deliberate choice of language to argue that DE is a failure. Many states responded to pressures from the U.S. Department of Education to improve outcomes through success initiatives on their campuses (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011; Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). Unfortunately, the language used in these reports has effectively shaped education policy reforms, as seen by the language of the resultant legislation.

A clear example is seen in codified Texas H. B. 2223 (51 Tex. Educ. Code, 2017) which establishes a sweeping mandate for corequisite course models. The CCA was influential in writing the plan and is cited as recommending that institutions prescribe choices for students in order to navigate higher education "and avoid taking excessive semester credit hours" to save money (*The Texas Higher Education Strategic Plan: 2015-2030*, 2015, p. 28). Again, the echo of the familiar theme as well as the influence of CCA discourse that "Time Is the Enemy" is folded directly into Texas education policy. Other states reacted to the CCA reports in similar ways. Florida legislators voided almost all of their mandatory placement policies by implementing voluntary remediation (Pain, 2016); the SUNY system chancellor sought to diminish the need for and use of DE entirely (Carden, 2012); and South Carolina, leaders saw DE as a waste of taxpayer

money with little evidence of student success (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2014).

Whereas the current conversations driven by external entities like CCA seem to advocate for college access and success and even invoke the language of social justice, it is difficult to take these presuppositions seriously when they fixate on a single segment of the "pipeline" and ignore rest (i.e., socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural) of the realities that provided both the catalyst and the mission for DE in the first place. It is jarring, therefore, for DE professionals to be confronted by language depicting the work of DE as a "barrier" to students.

In sum, CCA has taken the previously internal reflections on terminology to a national level, which has provoked much conversation. People are talking about DE at unprecedented levels, likely due, in part, to the efforts made by CCA. However, with very few exceptions, these conversations have been steeped in negativity and the results of these conversations have impacted the work of DE students, faculty, and administrators. The field of DE, as as previously known, has ceased to exist. Professionals in the field find themselves displaced and seeking to create a space for the invaluable work undertaken with the students whom so many deem unfit for college. It is our belief that the viability of DE lies largely in our ability to reclaim the narrative about the identity of the field and the students served. Reclaiming the narrative is the only way that the field and its professionals will be able to move beyond the deficit-oriented perspective of DE and onward to perceptions, policies, and practices that reflect its true mission: to ensure access and support success for all students.

Symposium: Responses from Professionals

This section, provides comments from three respondents in symposium style. The authors deliberately sought professionals from across DE disciplines (math, reading, and writing), across institution types (community college and public universities), and at different points in their careers (early-, mid-, and established-career points). Each respondent was offered the commentary in the introductory part of this manuscript, as well as four CCA reports to review or re-review: *Promise with a Purpose: College Promise Programs "Built for Completion"* (2018), *Time Is the Enemy: The Surprising Truth About Why Today's College Students Aren't Graduating…and What Needs to Change* (2011), *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere* (2012), and *Corequisite Remediation: Spanning the Completion Divide* (2016).

Our intent is not to vilify CCA or any other nonprofit entity examining issues related to postsecondary education but rather to question and

critique some underlying assumptions that become apparent when the language of that group is analyzed through a critical lens. The influence of terminology is far reaching. Professionals from all sectors of DE at various institutions and in various states have been impacted by the narrative surrounding the field. In our own ways, we are finding a way forward and we are using our spheres of influence to reclaim and reshape the narrative. Further, we have **bolded many statements in the responses and discussion section to highlight some of the ways that professionals of DE may begin to reclaim the narrative** of our field.

We asked the respondents to begin with a brief self-introduction and then to react to the materials with an eye toward the language of these reports. We then asked them to reflect on the pieces in light of the policy-related conversations within their own state, institution, or professional life as part of answering these questions:

- What are your thoughts about the influence of language on policy?
- What are your thoughts about the influence of language on the field?
- What are your thoughts on how we can change the narrative? What should we in the field focus on now?

What follows are the three responses.

Respondent 1

I am an Assistant Professor at Kennesaw State University with a background spanning mathematics and curriculum and instruction. My research focuses on college student persistence, particularly as it relates to STEM-based courses. I entered the field of DE with a passion for understanding and supporting historically underserved students' path to persistence. I chose developmental mathematics as a focus area for several reasons—one of which was because it was deemed a "gatekeeper" course when I knew in fact it should be a "gateway" course. It became my mission to support students in this transitional phase. Part of this quest involved diving into policy surrounding the field and researching academic and nonacademic factors contributing to students' success. As a relatively new scholar in the field, I have published in the *Journal of Developmental Education* (*JDE*; see Acee, Barry, Flaggs, Holschuh, Daniels, & Schrauth, 2017), presented research at several national and international conferences, received various awards from the National Association for Developmental Education (presently known as NOSS), and currently serve on the *JDE* Board of Editors.

After reviewing the CCA reports, followed by the presented manuscript, my initial reaction was "This dialogue is critical, the timing is impeccable considering recent policy changes, and it is about time we address others' deficit orientation and naive attack

on our field." I acknowledge the latter statement seems harsh; however, the continuous use of demeaning language to describe DE coupled with the negative undertone projected onto the field seems personal.

In the opening of this manuscript, the authors describe the influence of language on thought and action. I will follow that theme as an accurate depiction of why terminology matters. Perhaps persons or entities not in direct collaboration with those in the field do not understand the magnitude of how terminology impacts DE faculty, staff, and students. For example, in *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere* (2012), the authors acknowledge the vast number of underprepared students, yet the terminology implies that underprepared students' journey is indeed a "bridge to nowhere" with multiple "dropout exit ramp[s]" and "dead ends." This language evokes the thought that faculty are not doing their part in supporting students' success and that students properly placed in DE mathematics are inevitably destined to fail.

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In response, some states removed mandated placement into DE. For math, this sometimes translates into requiring early start programs, corequisites, embedded DE support in College Algebra, and alternative pathways such as quantitative reasoning courses for non-STEM majors. These reforms are a step in a positive direction for DE mathematics; however, when politicians and the public see these reports, they often stop at the jarring headlines that portray DE mathematics as a waste of time, money, and resources. For those masses who only read the titles and headlines and view the graphics, DE mathematics becomes framed as a course that should be removed completely. This impression then translates to an influx of underprepared students enrolling in College Algebra, thus adding to the high-DFW rate. So, although this chain-like effect stemming from outsiders' language and perceptions of our courses is often manifested with the best of intentions to support students, it can, conversely, shape policy erroneously and lead to problematic assumptions and ill-informed structural reforms.

Georgia, among other states, presumably felt the pressures of reform mentioned in the manuscript and, in 2011, launched Complete College Georgia (CCG). One of the five major work areas CCG identified for improving student access to and graduation from college is "Transforming Remediation: Improving

remedial education practices to remove barriers and increase success" (CCG, 2019). Again, although the objective to increase student success is warranted, the language describing DE as an intended barrier reinforces negativity toward the courses and field. The related actions on the part of Georgia legislature are clearly evident in the University System of Georgia's partnership with CCA. This connection is seen in the directive to replace DE mathematics courses with alternatives and in the recommendations of the Chancellors' *College 2025 Report* (University System of Georgia, 2018) to remove the traditional DE sequences and to rely heavily on corequisite models. Some of these changes I agree with; it remains a reality, though, that conversations outside of the field are leading policy and adding an uninvited complexity to our efforts to guide students from orientation to graduation.

Language not only impacts policy, but it also impacts those in the field. For example, titles such as *How to Help Students Avoid the Remedial Ed Trap* (Hechinger Report, 2018) and *Stuck at Square One: The Remedial Education Trap* (AMP Reports, 2016) imply that those in the field are systematically trying to keep students from succeeding. In *Time is the Enemy* (CCA, 2011), CCA even boldly designates DE as "the Bermuda Triangle of higher education" (p. 14). Part of the issue lies in outsiders not fully understanding the population of students we serve or the work we do.

For many students, the mere offering of DE mathematics is an opportunity to enter the doors of higher education. Ironically enough, in *Time is the Enemy* (CCA, 2011), CCA argues that we must first "see every student" in order to address their needs, another classic example of dismissing instructors' commitment to students. Further, there is an obvious disconnect between counting students and acknowledging that some populations come to college with statistics already stacked against them because of their backgrounds (e.g., in DE mathematics, there is a disproportionate number of minority, first-generation, and low-income students). DE mathematics may be the sole option for some students to even begin the journey. As professionals in the field, we consider that equity involves offering access to these students (i.e., into college and/or placement in College Algebra) and also providing students with pathways and supports that best work for the individual. Yes, sometimes the DE mathematics sequencing extends their time, but it does not shut students out nor does it offer a misleading promise, as implied by the CCA report *Promise with a Purpose: College Promise Programs "Built for Completion"* (CCA, 2018).

Toward the commentary of language impacting the field, there seems to be a stigma attached to students enrolled in DE mathematics and to the

content of the courses. Although this is indeed a conversation to be expanded separately, I will introduce a few ideas. Firstly, faculty in other departments, even mathematics itself, prematurely deem students unfit for college and offer opinions in ways that are not always voiced in the most constructive manner. Secondly, the deficit thinking of these individuals is then projected onto students. In turn, students leave with the message that they do not belong in college. Thirdly, research shows us that students' perceived barriers to success in college and in DE mathematics are primarily nonacademic (see Acee, Barry, Flaggs, Holschuh, Daniels, & Schrauth, 2017), though the narrative would have one think otherwise. And lastly, students are not just learning mathematics content. A primary focus in DE programs is the development of critical thinking and discernment skills to help students understand the applicability of mathematical knowledge valued in society for everyday use. The connotation apparent in deficit language is that students are just relearning what they learned in K-12.

What the authors are doing in this manuscript not only captures major sources of the deficit language and its widespread impact on the field, but the article also advocates that we continuously identify terms that truly embody DE without feeding into the stigmatized language placed upon us. One statement from the manuscript that particularly stood out was regarding the far-reaching influence of terminology on professionals as evidenced in having to create space for and prove the value of our work. *How did we get to the point of feeling as if we were in the backseat of our own field, needing to reclaim our narrative and assert our value?* Personally, I experienced the influence in the job search when completing my doctoral studies. Positions for tenure-track faculty in DE mathematics were scarce, though there seemed to be a fair number of adjunct, lecturer, limited-term, and instructor positions available. It led me to wonder if it was partially due to the language used describing our field and the resulting influence on policy. Perhaps the deficit-oriented terminology used to capture attention in reports and journals has left institutions unsure of the longevity of DE mathematics. Regardless of how it is referenced (e.g., developmental, remedial, gateway) or structured (e.g., corequisite, pathways, flipped), DE mathematics encompasses concepts and ideas that support the academic and nonacademic growth of underprepared college students. DE mathematics is a major factor in many students' college access and success. Those making the decisions to offer tenure-track lines must consider that it is going to take work and research to figure out how best to serve our students. Why not, then, support tenure-track positions that specialize in this invaluable work?

Changing the narrative has started with the authors' sparking much-needed dialogue through this manuscript and planned conference presentations. Changing the narrative demands that we dismantle the deficit thinking attached to our field. This comprises appropriately and strategically coining terms that reflect our work, our field, and the students we serve. It requires a constant conversation at the national table and not only within our field. It involves a reiterative cycle of research, practice, and reform. And, frankly, it is incumbent upon us to challenge any parameters that do not help "ensure access and support success for all students."

Respondent 2

Recently, I was at a dinner party seated next to a new social science colleague and she asked about what classes I taught. I smiled and informed her that I am a reading instructor at a midsized community college in California. She got very excited and said to me, "Do you call that remedial or developmental? I can never remember, but I really like knowing who those remedial students are in my classes because then I know who is going to have trouble."

I tried not to feel too offended that this woman was basically distilling my entire academic field of study into the assumption that I only teach students who struggle and are somehow deficient. In the 20

years I have been working in the college reading field, this is a fight I have had too often. When I say I teach college reading, people raise their eyebrows and say, "You teach reading? IN COLLEGE?" I sigh and feel obligated to set them straight. I explain that I actually teach critical thinking, metacognition, and learning strategies that help students in all future college classes. They still look dubious, but they admit, rather sheepishly, that, "Oh, I wish I had a class like that my first semester. It really would have helped my grades."

When I looked at the CCA reports referred to in this manuscript, I too was struck by the lack of understanding or acknowledgement of what we truly teach in college reading. Instead of talking about the knowledge-acquisition skills emphasized in college reading curriculum, the reports frame the DE field as deceiving the public. I agree with the authors of this manuscript that, "language used by outsiders in our field is deficit-oriented in nature and is used in ways that shape perceptions about our field." The two words used more often than not in these CCA reports are "time" and "failure": the time that remedial education wastes and the failure rate of our students.

Time
If we look at the words *developmental* and *remediation*, there is an implicit time factor involved in both processes. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines *developmental* as "designed to assist growth or bring about improvement (as of a skill)" and *remediation* as "the act of remedying." Both remediation and development take time to rectify a problem. So, the implication is that there is something wrong with the student that will then take time to correct. Therefore, time is indeed an entity that we, as faculty in the DE field, cannot ignore.

Many students' financial aid grants and loans are tied to course completion and there are newly implemented time limits that are critical considerations when taking courses. So, if students, and the counselors who advise them, view developmental courses as a waste of time and money, they will not enroll in a reading course even if it carries college-level credit. This is the situation in which many of my California colleagues find themselves. They developed college-level, transferable courses that used to be filled to capacity, but the narrative has changed, and counselors are now advising students not to take the courses because they are "useless" or "unnecessary." California state legislation, such as AB-705, has further exacerbated the situation. The AB-705 legislation uses words such as "delay" and "deter," subtly indicating that any course below college-level transfer is taking too much of students' time (California Community College Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2019a).

The change in course-taking behavior of students has been almost instantaneous. Within one semester, my college went from offering nine sections of college reading to offering four with even fewer on the horizon for next semester, and I know the situation is not different at our sister community colleges. This has led me and many of my colleagues to scramble around looking for a way to fill our load and serve the students we feel called to serve. This brings me to the language around "failure" that is so often used in the reports.

Failure
It does not help to deny the fact that the graduation numbers of students reflect a failure on the part of community colleges throughout the country. It is stated bluntly by CCA's report, *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere* (2012), that "the very structure of remediation is engineered for failure" (p. 2). If this is true, then we as members of this field must deeply question our practices and think about how we, too, have failed our students. Using the type of language that is used in external reports

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implies that those who teach these remedial classes are purposefully preventing students from success, even though most of these instructors began their job with the intention of helping those who might be struggling.

We in the field of developmental education have failed to clarify what we do as professionals in the field of DE. In the subsection ""Reform" as a Result of Terminology" the authors of this article make the point that external entities "fixate on a single segment of the "pipeline," which essentially ignores the other parts (i.e., socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural), the realities that provided the catalyst and mission for Developmental Education in the first place." If we begin with the assumption that developmental or remedial students need fixing, then we are working from a model of deficiency rather than strength. Simply using language such as remediation and developmental implies that those students are less capable. Instead, **I posit that we focus our energy on thinking about how we can reframe the conversation about what we teach and how we execute that instruction, especially given recent reforms in states like California.**

Recently, California implemented the Guided Pathways framework. This, coupled with the aforementioned AB-705 legislation, has changed the landscape of the community college (CCCCO, 2019b). The framework has very specific pillars that examine changes at all levels of the institution (i.e., on-boarding, course-taking patterns, course mapping) and includes a large focus on the student. However, **I offer the idea that a focus on the faculty and the type of instruction students are receiving is needed if the reform is to experience success.** Much of the literature on the reforms in California fails to mention the impact of the instructor on student success. This might stem from California's incredibly strong faculty unions and Academic Senates, which have purview on instruction. This is all the more reason why **we, as faculty, must be in charge of fine-tuning instruction to impact student success.** Otherwise, legislators will swoop in and dictate instructional reform, thereby stymieing innovation in the classroom.
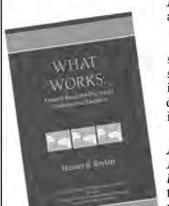
Our failure as developmental faculty is that we often work under the radar and are hesitant to share our best practices with our cross-campus colleagues because we believe the sharing will be unwelcome. However, if the reform literature asserts that we must "embed remediation into the regular college curriculum so students don't waste time before they start earning credits" (CCA, 2011, p. 9), then **focusing on strategy instruction in all disciplines would not be a failure on developmental instructors' part. Instead, our field can gain the greatest success by utilizing our wealth of research on learning strategies and metacognitive processes to teach our fellow faculty how to engage students in deep learning, using cognitive strategies and modeling thinking.** Hollander (2017), in her book on how to prepare students for the transition to college, reminds all faculty members that "we can try and offer students more mentorship in not just our specific subject matters, but in 'habits of mind' and the 'skill sets' we value so highly" (p. 37). **These "habits of mind" and "skill sets" include the types of strategies and processes that are commonly taught in developmental courses, and if students are not getting that instruction in courses that are now a "waste of time," we can teach our discipline-specific colleagues how to effectively infuse those strategies and processes into their curriculum.**

So, as a college reading person, I too must examine "time" and "failure" as words to describe my own career. I have 15-18 years left in the academy, and I must consider **how I can shift my focus to collaborating with my fellow faculty so that they will not fail the students I feel called to serve. I hope that the next time a new social science faculty asks me what I teach, I can say, "I teach faculty how to teach students how to learn."**

Respondent 3
I am an Assistant Professor at Chicago State University (CSU) with a research interest in literacy as a social practice and first-year, first-generation

student success. I teach at a four-year predominantly Black institution located in an urban community that serves a high concentration of students who are first generation, transfer, nontraditional, and part time as well as low income. I have been a part of the DE conversation locally and nationally through publications and presentations on the topic. Furthermore, **I come from an institution which has reshaped and reframed the narrative, at least institutionally, about developmental courses. The English developmental sequence at my institution has been in place since the mid-90s. All freshman students take a placement exam and are either placed in Composition I or Writers' Workshop I. Writers' Workshop I would be considered the developmental course, but it is actually Composition I with support.** Students who place into the Writers' Workshop courses earn and pay tuition for three credit hours but are provided with six contact hours a week and an embedded tutor. Faculty are actually paid for the three additional contact hours as well. Students earn college credit because the course carries a 1000-level designation, and the course is transferable. This has led to students electing to take this course even when they "place" into the traditional "college-level" section (sections without the additional three contact hours of support/lab). This design has led to deep conversations between students and advisors about the importance of

building a solid foundation in writing and, by extension, reading. Students become reflective and proactive when thinking about their needs because the workshop course does not carry an academic penalty (they get graduation credit, and it costs the same). It is not uncommon to hear a student say, "I want to take this course because I know I need to work on my writing, and I want the extra support." **As my institution shifted the way it talked about these courses, students became stronger decision makers regarding what they needed to succeed. They talked about how they benefited from the extra time, and they became more likely to avail themselves to other support services on campus (tutoring center and reference librarians to name a few). The language shifted the culture on campus in regard to developmental English courses and math and reading shortly followed.**

The State of Illinois is currently in the process of making statewide decisions regarding DE. Joint Resolution 41 states, "The traditional developmental education model costs students time, money, and financial aid" (S.J. Res. 0041, 2019). The use of "costs" already communicates the pervading idea that DE is a cost/liability instead of an asset that leads to success. The Resolution goes on to say, "To ensure all models of developmental education are maximizing students' likelihood of success, the State must inventory and evaluate all developmental education instructional

models offered in the State." So, this tells us that the State has decided that we, those who are at the institutions and in the classrooms, have not done our jobs to ensure that our models are maximizing student success, so now they have to do it for us. They have to do it as a group of state officials who may have very limited, if any, understanding of the field and the students. To say that our discussion here is urgent is an understatement. This approach resembles old school sorting of students into various professions and almost relegating them to a particular economic status. **DE can really be seen as a means or opportunity to finally serve populations who have been underserved.**

I would like to frame my response thinking about the students who I primarily serve in my practice and through my research. African American college enrollment is expected to increase by 26% by 2022 (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). The reports examined in this manuscript tell us that African Americans are among the population of students most likely to be placed in developmental courses for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, academic success. If we read just about anything published on student success in college, authors report that African American students, sometimes regardless of social class, have a difficult time transitioning to college

(see Burton et al., 1995), often without a discussion of the systems in place that may lead to these outcomes. They also report that African American students will most likely be placed in some form of DE at some point in their time in college and that the longer African American students stay in school (see Steele, 2003) regardless of social class, the more likely they suffer from a decline in success, even in college. Time is of the essence for all students, but especially for this particular population of students who we know are coming.

As a faculty member in the English department, my approach to this conversation is rooted in writing. Students, especially African American students, may find themselves in developmental English due to differences in the way they use language and/or differences in speech patterns. Delpit (1995), Paris and Alim (2014), and Smitherman (2003) are just a few scholars who have examined the impact of language variance on the academic success and perception of African American students. **In my own work, I use language and the ways people perceive others, particularly African Americans, based on language as an entry point into larger discussions about literacy, socialization, and academic success. Grogger (2009) examined the correlation between speech patterns and wages in African American and White youth.** His study sought to determine "whether racial differences in speech patterns help explain racial differences in wages" (Grogger, 2009, p. 2). In Grogger (2009), he found that African Americans who listeners can identify as African American, simply by listening to their voices, earn lower wages compared to African Americans whose speech is more aligned with Standard American English (SAE) and as White. Although no one, not even White people, speaks a pure form of SAE (see Gee, 1989), African Americans seem to be penalized for it at every level (academic and professional), and the reports do little to examine this as a potential barrier to success or cause for developmental placement.

The CCA reports considered here do more than present DE as a plague to be avoided; they present themselves as innovative in discussing the myriad of students who move through the academy and who may spend time in a developmental sequence at one point or another. However, they do little to fully examine the variety of ways and reasons that lead to developmental placement. For example, *Time is the Enemy* (CCA, 2011) opens with a discussion about the many student "groups" or "categories" typically excluded from discussions related to student success (part-time, transfer, nontraditional). This is somewhat true. Indeed, these groups have historically been excluded from data that determine a school's success based on criteria set forth by entities such as Carnegie classifications of institutions of higher education; however, these discussions have been held at the local level for years.

Minority-serving institutions and those that serve underrepresented and underprepared students as their mission have been publicly shamed through discussions about low graduation and persistence rates. Conversations about equity have only discussed student support in a limited way. On one hand, we push for equity—but then we push for policy that limits the way we support the students. Essentially, we can't have it both ways. We must be responsible for the students we admit in the name of equity.

Time is the Enemy (CCA, 2011) refers to remediation as the "Bermuda Triangle." This reference suggests that DE is a black hole where college students go to disappear. **Little to no attention has been paid to the examples of students who have spent time in DE courses who went on to graduate and enter their profession in a relatively timely manner and with confidence because they were given a space and opportunity to actually**

In a nutshell, it tells the public that DE is a waste of time and, by extension, so are the students who need it.

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develop, as the name developmental education implies. Developmental educators need to find avenues to share their students' success stories in such conversations. This report claims to be the first to count all students. It states that all students are now being counted; we now have a more complete picture of where we stand and what needs to be done. What does that actually mean? Haven't we always known who our students are and what needs to be done? The report repeats "there is no time to waste." What does this mean? In a nutshell, it tells the public that DE is a waste of time and, by extension, so are the students who need it.

DE, at its core, is a means of supporting student success. It is not intended to act as a gatekeeper. That is it. That is all. These classes require a time investment on both sides. Students invest time and faculty who teach these classes invest time. These classes are typically filled to capacity with students who need a variety of support (English as a second language, abilities accommodations, and academic support to name a few). To eliminate them will actually ensure that the obstacles stay in place. DE should be considered an asset and not a liability. Students actually gain and/or develop vital skills that set the foundation for success as they move through college. **What if we reset the narrative and describe DE as a space that is designed to support progress in a specific way and helps students counter their**

academic anxieties? In this way, DE does not need to be eliminated; it needs to be reframed.

A Bridge to Nowhere (CCA, 2012), like *Time is the Enemy* (CCA, 2011), situates DE as the thief of students' college degrees. It offers shining numbers that tell the reader how students who skip developmental courses do fine. **Missing in the discussion are the ways the teachers of those students took responsibility for teaching them and spent class time and energy on foundational material that shifted the class into a developmental course anyway. To its credit, this report does suggest embedding support in college-level classes to assist students with building foundational skills as the alternative,** but then what is the real difference here? Isn't this still remediation dressed up? There is an implicit belief that remediation will cease to be necessary if the classes are no longer offered. That is not the case.

Students will continue to enter college in need of support and colleges are responsible for supporting the students they admit. The way we name our students and our courses matter. The way students hear us describe them matters. There are many options for developing students' skills, but we first must agree that language matters just as much as the content we deliver.

Discussion

The message we have intended to convey, both in the introduction and the responses, is that language matters. In truth, for DE language has always mattered. But it matters now in unprecedented ways. As all three respondents have noted, deficit language such as that used by CCA affects how students are perceived, placed, and advised. They discuss how language influences the perceived stigma of being placed in DE courses. They also have acknowledged the impact on faculty who strive to support learners as they transition to college learning. **Part of supporting all students who enroll in college is to first recognize who the students are, a point Respondent 1 emphasizes as dismissed by the CCA report,** *Time is the Enemy* **(CCA, 2011), which admonishes faculty for failing to "see" the students. Yet, DE faculty strive to acknowledge the whole student, to recognize areas in which learners may require additional support, and to provide that support.**

And, despite general statements of equity in support of students, these reports do little to address the larger systemic social issues that prompted the creation of DE programs years ago. In this era of "reform," we in the field recognize that removing the so-called "barrier" to college completion may well also be removing the onramp to college. The respondents alluded to an oversimplification of assumptions in the CCA reports, especially surrounding issues of access and students' success. Often students, K-12 school systems, and DE instructors are blamed for students

needing DE support without addressing significant systemic barriers within postsecondary institutions.

All three respondents discuss the assumptions about time, money, and resources in several CCA reports as one example of this oversimplification of assumptions. Several respondents take issue with the idea of DE as a "gatekeeper" when, for many students, it provides essential support. For example, Respondent 1 discusses how taking a developmental mathematics class provides a needed pathway that will provide crucial access for students along with strategies for college success. Dismissing the time spent in DE courses as a waste of time is a dismissal of the students we serve. Respondents agree that it is time to change the narrative.

Similarly, all respondents have addressed how this narrative has changed their own careers and professional self-perceptions. For Respondent 2, a late-career reading instructor, this amounts to a look back at a career now marked by "time" and "failure." For Respondent 1 an early-career faculty member, this prompted bumpiness in her search for a tenure-line position. For Respondent 3, a takeover of state curricular approaches by state policy makers continues to frustrate and mute expert voices. These three respondents' professional experiences are representative of so much of what we are all struggling with at this time.

Although the CCA reports were simply our chosen focus for this piece, these documents are, unfortunately, representative of so much of the narrative surrounding the field at present. We contend that DE professionals must take ownership of the narrative surrounding the field, including our students and our faculty. We must explain the work we do, too, and how these courses serve as more than specific content; they are, in a sense, access points for much broader issues of enculturation. Instructors are powerful players in student success; they work across disciplines to share knowledge and support for student success, are open to learning to improve teaching, and report examples of students' success. Across the answers from the three respondents and their representative disciplines, what has been made clear is that math, reading, and writing all offer opportunities for development of critical thinking and metacognitive awareness that are used in future credit courses and beyond college. In this way, we can begin to reframe DE courses as a money and time investment (not a barrier) that brings long-term benefits, and, when well-designed, can be assets, not liabilities.

Conclusion

Developmental Education is at a critical crossroad, and its importance to student success has been challenged both historically and strongly in recent years. It is imperative for DE professionals to mold and take ownership of the narrative surrounding the field. Ownership of the narrative also includes finding ways to embed the work of DE in spaces where DE no longer exists, such as working within the disciplines to provide student support. For many political reasons, largely fueled by "facts" from reports such as those from CCA, states and institutions have sought to dismantle developmental education, as if getting rid of the courses would get rid of the need. In fact, there has been a rich history of student support from the very beginnings of postsecondary education (Stahl & King, 2009). Only when external entities see DE courses as gateways, not gatekeepers, will real change be evident.

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