CONSIDERING PRACTITIONER INFLUENCE ON STUDENT SUCCESS: EXPLORING COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In the context of persistently low retention rates for underrepresented students of higher education, the role of the practitioner in the academic success scholarship is largely understudied. There is comparatively little scholarship on the ways in which the practitioner influences the student’s experiences in college. This study addresses this knowledge gap by conducting research at the community college, often the institution of choice for underrepresented students, which explores faculty (the practitioner who most often engages with the student in the academic setting) perceptions and ideas of the essential knowledge needed to be a community college instructor. The research design is qualitative multiple case study using cross-case data analysis. The study was conducted at a Midwestern community college and through purposeful criterion and snow-ball sampling, nine full-time faculty participants were identified and successfully recruited to participate. The study used funds of knowledge, a framework located in the sociocultural scholarship of teaching and learning, which provides for the social construction of knowledge in the educational environment. Data collection methods included face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, observation of the classroom setting, and review of syllabi.

Two findings emerged out of the analysis of data and themes that reveal perceptions of essential knowledge of community college faculty. The first finding reveals, paradoxically, that while faculty perception of essential knowledge includes ability to meaningfully engage students, there is often an inability to do so. The second finding reveals that faculty perception of essential knowledge includes predispositions about students that seem to formulate out of the local context. The third finding goes to the ways in which faculty knowledge is formed. This finding
reveals the local context of faculty exerts a significant influence on the development of their funds of knowledge.
For Ryan
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Inequity in higher education has been and remains a significant challenge to the social fabric of the United States as college participation brings important social and economic benefits that continue to be disproportionately distributed. For example, students of color continue to graduate at lower rates than do White students (Aud, Fox & KewalRamani, 2010; Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009; Harper, 2006) and therefore are more often restricted from access to the advantages of a college degree. Indeed the value of a college degree continues to precipitously increase, thereby rendering the ethnic-based inequities increasingly significant, and making the education gap important to solve. Students with a college education are wealthier, healthier and enjoy elevated social status over their non-college going counterparts (McMahon, 2009).

Attention has been paid to the higher education equity challenge, as the scholarship on student success reveals that much work has been done to reduce the education gaps of students of color, or those students that are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. However, for the most part the efforts have failed to arrest a trend that began over a century ago (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson). In fact, at almost every institution type, nearly every field of study, and in many of the specialized certifications, underrepresented students complete programs of higher education at lower rates than their White counterparts (Harper).

The education environment, in the context of completion challenges for underrepresented students, is not static; indeed it is changing at a rapid pace. The changes in many respects have altered the ways in which education is delivered. For example, the rapid integration of computer and Internet technology into educational and administrative practices by staff, instructors, and administrators –the practitioners– of the institutions of higher education has established need for
the 21st century college student to have access to, and ability to effectively use, a computer and the Internet in order to participate (Garcia, 2010). As an administrator of a Midwestern U.S. community college, I am the practitioner who has been charged with integrating technology into almost every aspect of the College. At my college, students without access to a computer are challenged to apply for admission, register for classes, and, often, take classes. We have been so successful in our efforts to bring technology to the college that Blackboard (a computer-based course management system) is now used in a majority of the course sections – thus requiring a large percentage of our students to access course materials via a computer connected to the Internet. However, these changes may not be good for all students. There is evidence the changes have the potential to affect students already struggling in higher education. In the context of practitioner-led change like propagating the use of technology, there is evidence that underrepresented students are being negatively affected (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010).

There is evidence that not all students come to college with a computer. The equity challenge discloses that students cannot be treated as a monolithic body. The literature reveals that students, including underrepresented students, come to college with different capabilities, different experiences. There is a vast array of distinctive characteristics, capabilities and experiences that students bring to the educational setting (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Garcia, 2010; Hagedorn, Perrakis, & Maxwell, 2007). A relevant question becomes: what do the practitioners of higher education know about these unique experiences? Or, more directly, what do we know about our students, including our underrepresented students, and their experiences and how do we use this knowledge in developing our professional practices? How do we acquire our knowledge in developing our practices? Essentially, in the context of continued challenges for underrepresented students and ongoing changes to the environment by practitioners, this
study began with the basic question: is the student success challenge, in some respects, a practitioner knowledge problem?

**Research Problem**

John (a pseudonym) is a student counselor at my college. Seemingly, he is a good one. There are stories about John taking exceptional measures to help students. He has been known to spend hours with students (when the contact time with students is supposed to be measured in minutes), encouraging an unsure student that they have the ability to successfully transfer to a highly-rated four-year college and showing them what they need to do. He has been known to direct struggling students to enroll in classes with certain instructors who have a history of helping under-performing students. He has simply taken extra time to ensure a student understands the requirements of getting into a college, and what to do once in. John appears to be an example of a practitioner with the desire and the knowledge to help students.

Significantly, there is a lack of focus in the extant literature on the practitioner’s role in student success – there is a lack of focus on how practitioners like John influence the student’s experience in college. As provided by Bensimon (2007): there is a “lack of scholarly and practical attention toward understanding how the practitioner –[their] knowledge, beliefs, experiences, education, sense of self-efficacy, etc.– affects how students experience their education” (p. 444). The knowledge gap can be especially acute for underrepresented students, as Bensimon continues: “if our goal is to do scholarship that makes a difference in the lives of students whom higher education has been least successful in educating, we have to expand the scholarship on student success and take into account the influence of practitioners – positively and negatively” (p. 445). For the purposes of this study, the reference to practitioners includes higher education administrators, faculty serving in the role of instructor, and staff - which is
consistent with the literature (for example, see Bensimon, 2007; Cohen, 2005; Stage & Hubbard, 2007).

The preponderance of the research on success is focused on the student. The success research is focused on student characteristics, student behaviors, and student conformance to the expectations of the practitioners who develop the ways in which the institution of higher education will function. Essentially, the scholarship indicates that academic success is a function of individual assimilation into the normative environment of the college. Indeed the success scholarship is about student. While there is merit in considering success from the student perspective, what is largely left unknown is the role of practitioners. Tinto’s (1987, 1988) theory of student departure is one such example of research that takes a monolithic view of the student body, focusing on the responsibilities of the individual. Essentially, he asserts that persistence is a function of student integration into the social and academic environments of the college; the role of the institution and its practitioners has received very little emphasis (Bensimon, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Stage & Hubbard, 2007). Indeed my search of the digital libraries found a void in the scholarship on the role of the practitioner in student success, as there are very few studies in this area, and very little on the role of the practitioner in underrepresented student success. Underexplored is the ways in which practitioner knowledge, beliefs and experiences shapes the practices intended to support students, all students, in achieving their educational goals. Missing is scholarship on how people like John influence, positively and negatively, those that most need help – those that have historically been left behind in the halls of higher education. This gap in the scholarly literature becomes the focus of this study.
Research Purpose

While the rate of college going in the U.S. has increased steadily since the early 1900’s, underrepresented students remain on the margins of higher education (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009). Despite the many attempts to improve outcomes, the system of higher education has mostly failed to close the gaps for African American and Latino students (Bensimon, 2009), who are among the students historically underrepresented in higher education. As provided in the previous section, the focus of researchers in the success literature has mostly been on the student; missing is the practitioner and their employed practices that are used in the processes of educating students. The exclusion of practitioners in the studies on college success becomes especially evident when the scholarship on K-12 student success is examined. There, the practitioner—in the form of teachers, administrators and staff principle in the educational experience of students—is prominent, as researchers have been focused on helping to change educational practices in order to improve the educational experiences and therefore the success rates of students (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hoy, Tarter & Hoy, 2006; Reilly, Lilly, Bramwell & Kronish, 2011; Ringo, 2010). Moreover, the K-12 scholarship contains a significant body of work on the practitioner’s role in success for students of color—there is evidence of knowledge development designed to support student development and there is evidence of research findings being put into practice (for example, see Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). The K-12 scholarship includes well-considered ideas for practitioners to support students in successfully completing secondary education. These ideas include providing an anti-biased learning environment, and developing leadership for social justice by recognizing that students come to the classroom with differences; differences that are not weaknesses, but are strengths that can be used to create rich learning
experiences for all students (Frattura & Capper, 2007). Another significant factor that emerges out of the K-12 scholarship on practitioners is the origination of knowledge – how and where practitioners learn to do their job. More specifically, conceptualization of the construction of the knowledge, the know-how, to perform some activity, like instructing students, arises out of the literature that becomes the foundational framework on which this study is based and is next presented.

The funds of knowledge conceptual framework is located in the sociocultural scholarship of teaching and learning and stipulates essential, practical, knowledge is constructed out of communities of people who share ways of thinking and knowing (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 2000; Wolf, 1966). Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) define funds of knowledge as the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills” (p. 133) used by people in conducting the essential activities of their everyday lives. For the practitioner of higher education, the essential activities include the ability, the know-how, to provide principal education functions to the student. These functions include enrolling students into college, providing an effective learning environment, and others. Significantly, it is the environment itself that tends to mediate the construction of the knowledge needed to practice. For example, a considerable amount of the knowledge or know-how needed to be a teacher at a given school is developed through participating in the social structure of that given school (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). There is evidence the teacher learns how to teach, how things are done, at their school through his/her exposure to the school’s social environment.

Practitioners of higher education are also thought to develop the knowledge needed to do their job, develop their funds of knowledge, through everyday interactions with the college environment. Bensimon (2007) asserts these interactions could include talking with colleagues,
or reading journals and reports; or through socialization into the environment of the institution. It is thought to be through socialization that the norms of the institution are developed and propagated. It is these funds of knowledge, it is these ways of knowing how things are done, that are essential in establishing the educational practices of practitioners. Significantly, as the ways of knowing and doing seemingly originate out of the normative environment of the college, there are likely to be commonly-held ideas or principles that make their way into in the practices of educators. One such way of thinking is next described.

Bensimon (2007) argues practitioners’ funds of knowledge are likely to include the idea that students are “self-motivated actor(s) who exerts effort in behaviors that exemplify commitment, engagement, self-regulation, and goal-orientation” (p. 447). Therefore, practitioners are likely to establish practices based on their funds of knowledge that include a perceived normal student – the student who has the knowledge and experience that aligns with their ideas and their ideals. These ideas of student are likely to include a highly engaged participant who is motivated to accomplish their goals – one who consistently interacts with the academic and social structures of the college and therefore is able to adapt to, and is apt to, flourish in the environment. These ideas of student are likely to derive from the scholarship that emphasizes individual responsibility more than institutional. The success scholarship tends to consider all students similarly and therefore practices that attend to the normatively constructed student are appropriate (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). This is the prevailing student success paradigm under which practitioners have functioned for many years. This is the “dominant paradigm” (Bensimon, 2007, p. 451).

There is evidence of the dominant paradigm in the current context – evidence that stems from personal experiences. For example, practitioners implementing technology, like myself,
may make assumptions that all students come to college equipped with a computer and therefore our work to use technology to reduce cost and improve access to information is universally good – our prescription to improve educational systems is applicable for all students. However, perhaps practitioner’s socially constructed knowledge is incomplete with respect to student experiences and capabilities – incomplete with respect to the student and what they bring to the educational setting. Perhaps there are aspects of our practices that derive from our funds of knowledge that are insensitive to students who have struggled to complete their college goals. Perhaps our socially constructed knowledge, shaped through exposure to the social environment, ignores or does not account for the students who do not fit into the dominant paradigm. Perhaps the underrepresented student success challenge is in some respects a practitioner knowledge problem.

The issue, as previously asserted, is that we know very little about the practice-related knowledge of the practitioner. For example, we know little about practitioner knowledge of student’s experiences and capabilities, how these perceptions are influenced or mediated by the social environment, how these perceptions evolve with continued exposure to the environment, exposure to students. The practitioner of higher education who is responsible for a highly interactive role with the student in the academic environment is the faculty serving in the role of instructor (Braxton, 2006; Levin, Kater & Wagoner, 2006). However, faculty, serving in the role of instructor, do much more than interact with students. Indeed Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005), in a study of the relationship between faculty practices and the student’s college experiences, argue “faculty members may play the single most important role in student learning” (p. 176), and therefore their success. Their study, however, did not directly account for underrepresented students. Moreover, it is faculty teaching at the community college, the two-year public
institution that is a primary source of access to college for minority (or underrepresented) students (Bragg, 2001), that play an important role in the success challenge. However, the community college and its people have also been largely unsuccessful in closing the equity gaps (Bailey & Morest, 2006). It is important to know more about the practitioners who most often engage with the students at the college most often attended by underrepresented students. It is important to know the ways in which their funds of knowledge is developed and what it includes — perhaps it includes ideas of the dominant paradigm. Perhaps it includes ideas like all students come to college with a computer. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to explore faculty perceptions and ideas of the essential knowledge needed to be a community college instructor and the ways in which it includes students. It is important to understand if faculty perceptions and ideas of essential knowledge reveal aspects of culturally aware, socially just, instructional practices. Indeed this study turns focus on the practitioner who serves as an instructor, a teacher. It focuses on the teacher-practitioners who are responsible for instructing college students (also see Definition of Terms section that follows).

This study takes a qualitative approach in order to account for the unique characteristics and experiences of those who are at the forefront of teaching students – the community college instructors. While other methods can create generalizations of a larger population by systematically analyzing the relationships of variables using well-defined statistical processes, what often gets lost is the ability to provide a comprehensive reflection of the complex experiences that occur in a given social structure (Stage & Manning 2003). A social structure, for example, that may be responsible for mediating the development of practice-related knowledge. Qualitative research affords the ability to explore in-depth the experiences and complexities of individuals; “learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the
meaning it has for them” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). It was through the multiple constructions and interpretations of meaning that this study conducted an exploration of socially constructed knowledge and the potential influences of this knowledge on underrepresented student success.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are: 1) What are community college faculty perceptions and ideas of essential practice-related knowledge and in what ways is the student included? 2) What are the influences and experiences of community college faculty as they acquire their funds of knowledge?

**Significance of the Study**

Lack of knowledge by faculty of the unique experiences of their students could be a source of persisting educational inequities. For example, faculty knowledge gaps could prevent appropriate diagnosis of issues, as well as prevent positive change in creating an effective learning environment for all students. It may prevent faculty from accurately interpreting student behaviors and perhaps providing the needed support. As such, when underrepresented student performance does not align with expectations, does not exhibit the ideal of student, faculty who lack knowledge about their students may make erroneous assumptions and take actions that further exacerbate the problem. As provided by Bensimon (2007): “When practitioners lack knowledge of their students’ cultural lives, they are severely limited in their capacity to adapt their actions and be responsive to the particularities of the situation as these individual students experience it” (p. 453). A potential impact of faculty not understanding the unique experiences of their students is perhaps a missed opportunity to close the educational equity gap.

This study intended to add to the scholarship on underrepresented student success by conducting an empirical study focused on the job-related knowledge of the people who are
influential in creating the conditions for success - the faculty. The study was conducted at the college that is most often the choice for underrepresented students - the community college. I intended to produce findings that inform institutional practices. Additionally, I intended to inform faculty professional development programs by producing findings that support culturally responsive methods of instruction. I intended to identify ways to support inclusive teaching practices; practices that account for the diverse experiences that all students bring to the classroom.

**Definition of Terms**

*Course management system* is a system used by faculty in course delivery that includes the capability to create and edit course content, communication tools, assessment tools and other features designed to enhance access to information, and communication amongst students and faculty (Cole & Foster 2007).

*Funds of knowledge* is defined as the socially-constructed knowledge needed to conduct essential activities and responsibilities (Moll, 2000); faculty acting in the role of instructor is referenced in Cohen (2005) as a practitioner, and is the practitioner that is the focus of this study.

*Gateway Classes* are defined as the initial college-level English and math courses students are required to take. The gateway courses are considered an important momentum point for students to progress towards completion of their degree (Clery, 2011; Jenkins, Jaggers & Roska, 2009).

*Minority* often refers to African Americans and Latinos in the current discourse (Takaki, 2008) and is used in this study when referring to literature that also uses this term; more often referenced in this study is underrepresented individuals and/or students (see term below).
Practitioner is primarily defined as an instructor in this study - including a faculty member primarily serving in an instructor role as is often the case at the community college. It can also include administrators, counselors, and tutors of students (Cohen, 2005).

Success according to persistence theory is defined as remaining in college from year to year or attaining a credential (Tinto, 1987).

Technology is defined, in the context of this study, as: 1) a computer with software that performs functions like word processing, email, messaging, web applications, and a host of specialized functions commonly used in educational practices (Oblinger, 2012); 2) the Internet, a worldwide, publicly accessible network of interconnected computer networks that transmit and receive information.

Traditionally underrepresented students are defined as groups of students who have historically been on the margins of higher education. These groups include African Americans and Latinos, as well as Native Americans (Swail, Redd and Perna, 2003). For the purposes of this study, underrepresented students refers to African Americans and Latinos, as, first, the literature reveals that these groups are among those that struggle the most in higher education; and, second, the research site selected for several ideal characteristics that are explained in chapter three, has a very low population of Native Americans.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter begins with a review of the funds of knowledge literature, which was used as the foundational framework for this study. The applicability of funds of knowledge to this study is brought forth in the review. Then, a review of the literature on underrepresented student success is provided, which is the phenomenon under study, and reveals students who are underrepresented in the institutions of higher education continue to face considerable challenges in obtaining credentials similar to their White counterparts. Therefore, not only are certain groups of students less likely to attend college, there is considerable evidence indicating that they are less likely to complete – creating an ever-widening gap in the system of higher education. This chapter concludes with a review of the literature on the community college – the institution that is often the college of choice for underrepresented students, and the setting for this study.

Funds of Knowledge Framework

This study utilizes the funds of knowledge framework as a conceptual foundation. The funds of knowledge framework has evolved out of the research and work of several scholars, including Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg (1992), and Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992), who conducted studies on teaching and learning in a socio-cultural context. The framework is based on the work of anthropologist Eric Wolf (1966) whose research includes examining the lives of the impoverished in Latin and South American countries, as well as conducting research on human survival in the context of complex social environments. Specifically, Wolf created the basis of the framework through research that examined the social characteristics and behaviors that members of a particular community required to survive – survive by acquiring the knowledge needed to nourish, shelter, cloth and provide other essential needs. The funds of
knowledge framework is appropriate for this study of members of a social system, faculty, who must acquire and develop knowledge sufficient to maintain or advance standing in the system. For this study, funds of knowledge offers a conceptual framework that can inform educational practice, as it facilitates development of scholarship on the ways of knowing for faculty (Gonzalez, 2005). The funds of knowledge conceptual framework provides a useful basis for conducting a study about what faculty know, and how they know it. The same faculty that are highly involved in the ways in which students experience the educational environment - they are involved in their successes and their failures.

The literature reveals several major areas in which the funds of knowledge has been developed and applied. Many of the empirical studies focus on knowledge development in the household, and in the educational setting. Therefore, household and educational contexts are the basis for organizing this review of the literature on funds of the knowledge. However, first provided are the origins of the funds of knowledge framework.

**Origins of the funds of knowledge.** The roots of the funds of knowledge framework are anthropological, as it is the term originally used by Wolf (1966) to identify knowledge developed and distributed within a particular social environment. Funds of knowledge, in the context of the impoverished communities of Latin America, equates, according to Wolf, to the essential skills and know-how needed to nourish, cloth and provide shelter. Specifically, Wolf refers to caloric funds, funds for rent, replacement funds, ceremonial funds and social funds. Each of these is reference to the organically developed behaviors, skills and abilities one requires in order to survive in a social structure – they translate, again, into providing food, shelter, transportation and other essentials.
Velez-Ibanez (1988) conducted an ethnographic study of impoverished Latino communities in the United States and Mexico utilizing the tenants of Wolf’s work for a basis on which to discover the ways in which the communities functioned. The researchers found a surprisingly rich and diverse base of knowledge within the communities they studied. For example:

…information and formulas containing the mathematics, architecture, chemistry, physics, biology, and engineering for the construction and repair of homes, the repair of most mechanical devices including autos, appliances and machines as well as methods for planting and gardening, butchering, cooking, hunting and making things in general. Other parts of such funds included information regarding access to institutional assistance, school programs, legal help, transportation routes, occupational opportunities, and for the most economical places to purchase needed services and goods. For the most part, clustered households are very self-sufficient and do not depend greatly on [external entities, such as the government] for technical assistance. (Velez-Ibanez, 1988, p. 38)

Wolf (1966) found, as did Velez-Ibanez (1988) that the conduit for knowledge development within a community is a strong social structure. Specifically, they found that funds of knowledge largely depends on having solid, pervasive, communication linkages amongst members of a community or, as Merriam-Webster defines the word community, a group of people that share common ideals, interests or goals. Differently stated, they found that a cohesive, functional, social structure is an essential element of a productive community. The essential and underlying element of funds of knowledge is the know-how to participate in a social environment is mediated by the environment itself.

Autonomy is also an important aspect of funds of knowledge. Specifically, Wolf (1956) argues the group, or the social system, by having a tightly woven structure, naturally seeks
autonomy. The culturally connected group of people will instinctively attempt to limit interference from external forces. Therefore, the social system is often bounded by some geographic, cultural, kindred (or other) force, and is therefore somewhat of a closed system. They become a collection of people that are bound to certain ways of knowing and doing. They become bound to one another and if, what is perceived to be, outsider influence arises, resistance can occur. The closed nature of the social system is an important aspect of my study, as college practitioners may be members of a closed social system that creates inability to understand the differences students bring to the classroom. My study will explore the sources and the systems of college practitioner knowledge development.

As previously provided, the household and the educational environment largely divide the literature on funds of knowledge, and as such this review is similarly structured. It is out of the work of a contingent of scholars at the University of Arizona that significant scholarship on household funds of knowledge was developed. Next reviewed is the work of these scholars and others on funds of knowledge developed in the household.

**Funds of knowledge acquired and used in the household environment.** Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) define funds of knowledge as the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills” (p. 133) used by people in conducting the essential (often domestic) activities of their everyday lives. It is about the knowledge the individual and the community. As previously stated, the community is comprised of a collection of individuals who are linked or bound together in some way—need in order to form a productive social structure. More specifically, funds of knowledge is about the acquiring the ability to effectively function as a collective of people in unique environments with unique challenges. The funds of knowledge is about contextual ways of knowing and doing.
Empirical studies conducted by Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil and Moll (2001) and by Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) revealed that tightly connected Latino communities considered poor by outsiders were actually rich in a variety of ways. The community contained members with the skills and talents that, when combined, effectively contributed to maintaining the households of the community as well as the community itself. Perhaps more importantly, the researchers found, just as did Wolf (1966), that funds of knowledge, the know-how that is needed to survive in a society, is essentially a function of the society itself, as it is the social environment that facilitates the development of essential knowledge needed to maintain the health and welfare of a collective. From the funds of knowledge literature, it is revealed that knowledge that had been retained and handed down for generations was largely a function of the social structure. Knobel (2001) adds to scholarship on the social construction of knowledge through case study research that revealed family members handing down practical information. For example, the study contained narratives of a father who helped his son to learn about accounting, marketing and other aspects of running a successful business. The father mostly did so by having his son observe. The son observed and learned how to work with suppliers, how to get needed funding for a business, and how to effectively market the services that the business provides. The son then used the knowledge handed down by the father to create a business of his own; one that supplied lawn and garden services to members of the community. Importantly, the son not only obtained the knowledge needed to start a business but he gained confidence that it was possible. As Velez-Ibanez (1996) argues, funds of knowledge arising out of the household environment often results in doing something productive with newly acquired skills as the recipient is able to learn about effective application; he or she is able to see how something works and thereby becomes confident to use it for some purpose of their own.
Another example of the socially constructed nature of the knowledge needed to effectively participate comes from a study by Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992), which found children in a poor Latino community added to the capacity of the community by establishing their own businesses by using the wisdom passed along from members of the community. For example, several children had established confectionary businesses – making and selling candy using unique recipes and techniques that were handed down for generations. The children, essentially, were becoming productive members of the community at a very young age. These children were ready to grow into even more productive older members. Perhaps like those who were skilled in real estate development and sales. While not specifically stated, the narratives of the elders’ work created images of people who were skilled in acquiring and improving land, building functional spaces to live in order to increase its value as well as the value of the community. Also, the people of this particular social structure were knowledgeable of agriculture (planting and nurturing crops), construction, carpentry, masonry and automobile repair. They were also accomplished with modern medical practices and with folk medicine (herbal medicines and folk cures). Essentially, the researchers found a rich base of know-how, organically produced by a substantial group of resourceful people in what was considered poor, deprived, Latino communities in southern Arizona. This knowledge represented, in many respects, survival. Moreover, the community, through effective means of transferring knowledge amongst its members, was continuously building capacity. They were adding to the pool of knowledge and skills required to perform critical functions - functions that supported the survival of the entire social entity. Appendix B provides a graphical representation of household funds of knowledge and the capacity-building utility that is inherent within social structure.
Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil and Moll (2001) provide a useful summary of the essential elements of the social environment that contribute to household funds of knowledge, which also provides an intriguing segue to the educational environment. The authors argue that knowledge is “always mediated, distributed among persons, artifacts, activities, and settings. People think in conjunction with the artifacts and resources of their social worlds and these artifacts and resources, in turn, are found in their social words, and made available through the social relationships and settings within which human beings constitute their lives” (p. 122). Not only does the scholarship on funds of knowledge in the educational setting reveal that practitioner know-how is socially constructed, that it is developed by actively participating in the social environment which is comprised of norms and ways of knowing, there are thought to be artifacts and resources which exerts persistent influence on practitioner’s funds of knowledge. The next sections explore the literature on funds of knowledge in the educational context, and, what I will label an artifact or an item of interest, the dominant paradigm.

**Funds of knowledge in educational contexts.** Just as knowledge is socially constructed in the household environment, so too is there social construction of knowledge in the higher education environment - one that provides a significant influence on those who administer, teach and staff our colleges. Essentially, the practitioners of higher education –the staff, faculty and administrators who operate these institutions– are part of an environment in which knowledge is organically developed, refined and shared. It is within this environment that faculty, for example, develop the knowledge needed to perform their role as instructor. It is where instructors of students develop the wherewithal to solve problems, where they learn to successfully navigate the social institution that is a college, where they learn how to effectively carry out the duties and responsibilities of the job (Bensimon, 2007). The practitioners of the college are actively
participating in a complex social structure and are developing the knowledge needed to survive – just as did the children of the impoverished Latino communities.

The literature provides that practitioners of higher education develop funds of knowledge through formal and informal engagement with the social environment. Bensimon (2007) argues faculty members can build their funds of knowledge through daily interactions with peers, by observing students, or by reading articles, professional journals and books related to teaching, learning and other topics linked to education. They can also do so by engaging in professional development activities such as taking additional coursework or attending workshops, and “by being socialized into the norms of professional practice and the culture of their own institutions and departments” (Bensimon, 2007, p. 451). Importantly, these interactions, which provide a mediating influence in the development of the knowledge that faculty apply to their jobs, is likely constructed within a tightly knit, somewhat closed, environment – within the formal and informal social structures of the college. The implication is the social environment of education can be rather inwardly focused as the interactions in the knowledge acquisition process are expected to be primarily with other education professionals, as opposed to interaction with the external environment – e.g. students and families of students, and other members of the community at large. This insulation could result in lost opportunity to learn more about the backgrounds, challenges, fears and ideas that students bring to higher education. The issue of practitioner funds of knowledge construction going unconnected to the unique environments of the students is covered next.

Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) found, in their studies of Latino secondary education students that teacher-student relationships were “thin” (p. 134), when compared to the “thick” (p. 133) relationships students maintained with their families and members of the
community. Zanoni et al. (2011) similarly found that Latino students and their families often lack meaningful relationships with members of the education system (and their study found that meaningful connections, when encouraged, can be very powerful). From the perspective of thick connections, the dense nature of student-family relationships is attributed to many interlocking strands amongst the people - many rich, active and productive paths of interaction amongst the members of the student’s social environment. Contrary to these thick relationships, the educational relationships mostly included a one-way transmission of information from teacher to student. In the educational context, according to the researchers, knowledge seems to be more imposed upon the students rather than shared with them. Teachers seemed to know their students only in the context of the classroom, creating an environment that appeared rather sterile and isolated. Largely untapped was the unique knowledge the Latino students brought to the classroom; largely unexplored was the life’s experiences and ways of knowing of the students, as well as the possibility to create an enriched learning environment by interjecting the experiences of the Latino students into the instruction. Also lost was the possibility of creating rich and productive learning experiences for the instructor. Essentially, the research reveals that teacher funds of knowledge is likely to evolve out of a rather closed social structure, which is not surprising given that, as Wolf (1966), Velez-Ibanez (1988) had found, knowledge development largely depends on pervasive linkages amongst members of a community – it depends upon a collection of people that share common ideals, interests or goals. The teachers in this study were simply behaving as expected, as one whose primary interest was to assimilate into a common collective. However, when the teachers were brought out of the classroom, and exposed to environment of the student, then, new learning took place. This part of the study is covered next.
A study by Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) was intended to not only learn about teachers in their own social environment, it was intended to bring them out of the classroom and into the student’s environment. It provided an opportunity for the teacher to learn more about the student by making teachers part of the research team and going into the field, going into the households of the students. Specifically, the goal of the study “was to explore teacher-researcher collaborations in conducting household research (going into the student’s social environment) and to use this information to develop classroom practices” (p. 135). Essentially, outcomes of the study included rich learning experiences for the teachers. It allowed them to learn that Latino students brought a wide array of personal experiences to the classroom that had gone unrecognized or unvalued by practitioners. For example, the researchers learned one student had been a frequent international traveler, and had accumulated knowledge over the course of his many trips that could have been applied to history, sociology, science and literature. However, no one had, previous to the research project, asked the student about his experiences outside of the classroom. Essentially, the Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez study found, as argued by Bensimon (2007), that practitioner’s funds of knowledge are often constructed from interactions of the closed social structure. The external environment, the domestic (household) environment of the student, can be rather disconnected from the environment in which practitioners are professionally oriented. These same social structures are the mediating entity on which the know-how to do the job is constructed, and since they can lack connection to the student’s lived experiences they are, as previously stated, rather thin in nature. The literature indicates that knowledge to do the job can be rather myopically constructed by practitioners for practitioners.

The studies on funds of knowledge in education, in addition to finding thinly constructed linkages to the student’s home environment and therefore void in teacher awareness of the
student’s world outside the classroom, provide findings that illuminate the benefits of teachers establishing or enriching these connections. Gonzalez (2005) and Gonzalez, Moll & Armanti (2005) conducted studies that found when teachers do establish connections to the domestic environment of the student, when they learn about a variety of experiences Latino students can bring to the classroom, the result is enriched learning for everyone, including the teacher. Student’s lived experiences, when they are exposed and integrated into teacher’s funds of knowledge, can inform educator’s practices.

Andrews and Yee (2006) conducted a multiple case study that essentially explored the possibilities of connecting student funds of knowledge to the educational environment and therefore inform educator practices (if the appropriate linkages are constructed). In one case, a student named Nadia (a pseudonym) lived in a household environment that valued learning and had developed practices to support learning on a daily basis, Her father described activities that he developed for his children to learn mathematics. For example, Nadia was responsible to count and measure the ingredients for her mother to use in making the family meals. Additionally, she was responsible for reconciling the money in the family till against the amount spent during shopping trips. The assignment was essential as her mother was not familiar with local currency. While Nadia’s learning activities might have been useful for her teacher to know about, as they would have, at the very least, helped the teacher to have information about her abilities as she entered the classroom for the first time, the researchers found that Nadia's teacher was not aware of them. The teacher also did not know that Nadia had extensive exposure, via frequent travel with her family to other countries, to a variety of cultures and conditions. The result, again, was lost opportunities to inform instructional practices that could enrich the classroom.
That practitioner funds of knowledge is developed out of the orientation of the community, a social structure of people with common ideas and ideals, again, is not surprising. As argued by Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil and Moll (2001), individuals tend to have ways of knowing and thinking that is influenced by the “artifacts of their social worlds and these artifacts and resources, in turn, are found in their social words” (p. 122). One such artifact, or item of interest, in the social world of the practitioner is what Bensimon (2007) calls the dominant paradigm. Bensimon argues the higher education practitioner funds of knowledge is likely to include a perspective of their students that has developed over time and perhaps has become an engrained way of thinking. Essentially, the dominant paradigm can be thought of as an artifact in the practitioner’s social environment and the inclusion of it into their funds of knowledge emphasizes both the thin relationships between practitioner and students, and that knowledge in education is mediated by individuals who share common ideals. These ideals form the idea of the college student.

**The dominant paradigm.** The concept of dominant paradigm refers to an ideal of student that is constructed out of the scholarship on student success. The student, in the dominant paradigm, is depicted “as an autonomous and self-motivated actor who exerts effort in behaviors that exemplify commitment, engagement, self-regulation, and goal-orientation” (Bensimon, 2007, p. 447). More specifically, the scholarship prescribes, for example, that success –success according to persistence theory is defined as remaining in college from year to year or attaining a credential (Tinto, 1988)– is likely to increase through the student’s sustained interaction with the academic and social environments of the college (Tinto, 1987, 1988). The goal-oriented student is motivated to engage with the college environment and therefore becomes adept at navigating the social structures of the dominant culture. The environment of the college is a function of the
norms of the institution – a function of the norms developed by the dominant culture. These norms often originate from scholarship and from practitioners that perhaps fail to consider underrepresented students, and are perpetuated via the social environment of the institution and again, serve to create the ideal of student.

Problematically, in the dominant paradigm, the student body is viewed as a homogeneous entity where each member is expected to conform to engrained expectations and notions – where there is little accommodation for the unique experiences and backgrounds that all students bring to the campus (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). The result is a campus that is often hostile to underrepresented students, as practitioners lack the knowledge and ability to create an environment that is both accepting and utilizes the strengths of underrepresented students. They lack the ability to use the unique experiences of all students to strengthen their instructional practices. These unique experiences, as found in the studies of Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992), can include cultural and familial influences that brings a wealth of enrichment to the classroom, if they are mined by the practitioner. Instead, practitioners tend to blame the student for failing to conform to traditional ways of thinking; they attribute underrepresented student failure to the student and not to themselves (Bensimon, 2007). The result is an environment that perpetuates the ideals of the dominant culture – an environment that perpetuates the dominant paradigm and likely creates a socially unjust educational system. It is in this system that the underrepresented student attempts to participate and to succeed. The experiences of underrepresented students in higher education, in the community college, are next explored.

**Underrepresented Student Success**

Underrepresented student success in higher education remains a significant problem. The literature reveals that at almost every institution type and in nearly every field of study the
underrepresented student completes programs of higher education at lower rates than do their majority counterparts (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009; Harper, 2006). Moreover, as the value of higher education is ever increasing, in the form of greater access to social and economic benefits (Baum & Ma, 2007), the gap in underrepresented student completion represents inequities in social and economic mobility. Mobility that is enabled through credentials received from institutions of higher education (McMahon, 2009). As this study focused on learning more about faculty development of knowledge and its influence on underrepresented student success at the community college, the literature on the current state of underrepresented student success is important. This section of the literature review first provides key data-points on underrepresented student success in higher education, and then presents four common challenges to underrepresented student success that surfaced from the scholarly literature, and concludes with a summary of the section.

**Data from the literature on underrepresented student success.** Just as issues of underrepresented student success are not confined to one higher education institution type or program type, neither are they confined to one particular group of people. The problem of underrepresented student success touches African Americans both male and female, Latinos and Native American Indians of both genders as well. Essentially, it is a problem that knows no bounds, as it involves individuals of color throughout the educational system of the United States. However, there is a significant base of literature that is focused on certain underrepresented groups – providing data that helps to elucidate the problem of underrepresented student outcomes in higher education. African American students are one such group.

Alfonso, Bailey and Scott (2005) used two Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal (BPS) studies to analyze the educational outcomes of sub-baccalaureate occupational students in
certificate and associate’s degree programs at the community college. They found that ethnicity was a significant factor for students who failed to reach their educational goals. Specifically, they found that African Americans in associate’s degree programs at the community college were less likely to reach their education goals than other students. In other words, African American students with a goal of completing an associate’s degree failed to achieve their goal at a higher rate than other students in the study. Gender is also a significant factor for underrepresented student groups.

There is significant base of evidence that African American men in higher education struggle to complete their educational goals. Attrition, where the student departs college in advance of completing their intended course of study, for example a bachelor’s degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), is one indicator African American males are succeeding at lower rates than their majority counterparts. Hagedorn, Maxwell and Hampton (2001), in a study of underrepresented student outcomes in the community college, found that African American male attrition was disproportionately higher than their White male counterparts. The African American men of this study departed college prior to program completion at nearly twice the rate of other students. Further evidence of the significance of the attrition problem for African American males is found in longitudinal data of graduation rates by gender and ethnicity. For example, between 1997 and 2003, degree attainment for African American men across all sectors of higher education, including four-year and two-year institutions, increased by only 0.2 percent – with the most significant gains in associates degrees (Harper, 2006). This insignificant gain provides evidence that African American men made almost no appreciable progress in the American system of higher education. Moreover, and again across all degree levels, White males earned more than ten times the degrees as African American men. Additionally, the statistics
reveal that, on average, more than two-thirds of African America men in college do not graduate within six years; which is the lowest rate of all ethnic groups (Harper). In other words, approximately 66 out of every 100 African American men that enter college do not complete their program of study within a six-year period. Indeed while there is need for improvement in outcomes for all groups entering higher education, when accounting for race and gender, African American men represent the group of those most likely not to attend college and most likely, when they do attend, to not complete their goals (Bowen, Chingos, McPherson, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper 2006). Indeed African Americans have long struggled in America’s system of higher education. It is not unreasonable to claim that our system of higher education has failed far too many people for far too long.

The evidence from the literature on Latino student success also paints a troubling portrait. As of 2008, approximately 29 percent of the adults in the United States – adults defined as an individual 25 years of age or older – had earned a bachelor’s, masters or doctoral degree (Aud, Fox, KewalRamani, 2010). However, when examining the rate of bachelor’s degree attainment by ethnicity, the gap in educational success becomes evident: while White adults earn bachelor’s degrees at the rate of 33 percent – approximately one out of every three White adults have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher –, Latino adults earn them at the rate of 13 percent. Differently stated, approximately one out of every eight Latinos earns a bachelor’s degree while one of three Whites earns a degree (Aud, Fox, KewalRamani). When considering that the total population of people in the United States in 2010 was 308 million, the gap in achievement rate for Latinos becomes exceptionally large and exceptionally troubling not only for the Latinos but for a country that is trying to develop a more educated population.
While a significant portion of the literature on underrepresented student success is linked to gender, or a particular ethnic group, or income level, it also reveals there are several factors, specifically three factors, which tend to adversely affect the educational attainment for underrepresented students. These factors are: academic related, navigational, and institutional. First, I will address the academic related factors of underrepresented student success.

**Academic factors of underrepresented student success.** The academic-related factors negatively affecting higher education success of underrepresented students that emanates from the scholarly literature are focused on preparation. The scholarly discourse essentially suggests that a significant barrier to underrepresented student success is preparation for college. The findings on success challenges includes the premise that underrepresented students leave secondary education inadequately prepared for the academic demands of higher education. Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes and O’Brien (2007), in an ethnographic study of the barriers experienced by community college students in achieving their educational goals, found that Latino students were more likely to have graduated from high school without having taken college preparatory classes (p. 179) and therefore were relegated to taking remedial education at the community college. The prospect of spending many semesters in non-credit math and English classes, with no progress towards degree completion, created a negative pull on Latino students persisting in higher education. The findings from this study is supported by a substantial base of literature, which reflects that underrepresented students do not receive adequate preparation for college from the secondary education system (Fry, 2004; Shaw & London, 2001; Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004; Wellman 2002). Additionally, Alexander et al., in a review of data produced by the state of Texas, found that 33.1 percent of Latino students enrolled in the Dallas County Community College system had received a high school degree that was intended to
prepare for college. However, White students at the community college had received college preparatory education at a 44.9 percent rate – an approximate 12 percentage point difference in the preparation level for groups of students entering college.

The academic preparation gap is also revealed when examining the rate of underrepresented student participation in math and science classes in high school. Underrepresented students enroll in math and science courses at a lower rate at almost every level of elementary and secondary education in the United States (Clark, 1999; Oakes, 1990). The result, given that math and science classes are frequently at the curricular core of high demand programs in health, science and technology and they are required subjects in order to be admitted to many of the 4-year institutions (Clark), is the options for participating in higher education for underrepresented students becomes constrained (Baily & Morest, 2006; Bensimon, 2009; Dowd, 2003). The lack of academic preparation in math and the sciences relegates underrepresented students to community college remedial education and low-demand academic programs that often do not lead to high paying jobs. Moreover, the academic preparation gap is not isolated to math and science, as African American and Latino children do not have access to the curriculum, teaching, and other resources, such as technology, needed in order to deliver high quality learning in secondary education (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Often the community college becomes the only choice for the underrepresented student, and when combined with preparation issues for these students, the ability to succeed in college becomes highly challenging (Perrakis, 2008).

Navigational factors of underrepresented student success. Unfamiliarity with social systems, like those of the institutions of higher education, gives rise to an array of challenges that can negatively influence student success. The unfamiliarity with, and the inability to navigate, these complex structures comprised of people, technology, procedures and processes creates
challenges for many. For underrepresented students, the unfamiliarity with the systems of higher education can have a negative pull on achieving educational goals.

Institutions of higher education are often complex bureaucratic entities (Birnbaum, 1988) that require expertise and experience to navigate (Alexander et al., 2007). Underrepresented students and their families often are not exposed to the systems and processes of the college, which creates navigation-related challenges and creates challenge when compared to their majority counterparts (Alexander et al.). The issues faced by underrepresented students are not inconsequential, as imbedded in the institutional structures are functions such as admissions, which alone can include a complex set of procedures and therefore hurdles for the student in gaining access to the college and its fundamental services. Additionally, the student must know how to actively engage with the institution’s systems and people in order to determine educational goals and academic programs appropriate for the goals; how to search and register for classes; and how to finance their education - to name but a few. Moreover, the lack of familiarity can be particularly challenging for community college students, including underrepresented students, as the community college student is more likely to be working, raising families, or attending part-time than those at a four-year college (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Bean & Metzner, 1985). Several studies reveal the navigational challenges encountered by the non-traditional underrepresented community college student, which are next examined.

Unfamiliarity with the nuanced structures and systems of higher education can be particularly punitive for underrepresented students and, importantly, can have an impact on success. Garcia (2010), in a study of Latino community college students, found that minority women, who are often faced with attending college and raising children, are susceptible to
intimidation by college people and processes, which creates navigational challenges. In one particular case, a Latino female single parent, struggling with her college classes, did not realize that she could attend college part-time. For this student, when advised by a counselor that she could have taken one or two classes each semester, she replied: “I wish I had known it was okay for me to attend college part-time my first semester and I wouldn’t have been experiencing so much trouble” (Garcia, 2010, p. 843). The student further expounded that it was her own ideas about the ways in which college worked that caused the self-perceived requirement of full-time attendance. Moreover, she stated that she did not know whom to ask about course load requirements of the college. More specifically, this single parent in college for the first-time needed help and did not know where to find it. The result was an individual, an underrepresented student, struggling to meet her educational goals – and challenges related to navigating the complex systems of a social institution were, in many respects, at the core of problem.

It is not unusual for minority, or underrepresented, students to have difficulty navigating a college (Alexander et al. 2007). Nor it is unusual for navigational knowledge gaps to create challenges for the minority student (Aragon & Kose, 2007). Garcia (2010) found that underrepresented students misunderstanding of college procedures and policies could frequently lead to inadvertent failure. For example, the author asserted that unawareness by underrepresented students of the need to officially drop a class in order to avoid receiving a failing grade is not an anomaly. Several students were surprised to learn that non-attendance did not equate to course withdrawal. Whereas students with greater knowledge of how college works have the ability to monitor their academic progress - they know that it is highly important to monitor their progress and their academic standing (e.g. GPA, credit hours and key dates). These are the students that know the system. They know when, how and why to drop a class in order to
optimize academic performance as well as to get maximum financial benefit (Garcia). They know how to avoid fees and recover paid tuition; while those with less knowledge of the system can suffer the consequences of missing deadlines that lead to failing grades and therefore challenges in completing their academic objectives and goals.

Navigational challenges for underrepresented students can also lead to a removed, or disconnected, state with the college environment. Underrepresented students are often not aware of the significance of interacting with faculty and staff of the college; nor are they aware of the importance of developing relationships with peer students. According to the extant literature, there is evidence that underrepresented students tend to minimally interact with the campus environment, and tend to not trust that faculty and peer students have their best interests in mind (Hagedorn, Perrakis, Maxwell, 2007). Men of color in particular can view members of the campus environment as a threat (Gardenhire-Crooks, Callado, Martin, Castro, 2010). Their experiences have led to trust issues. They have developed social structures that do not include people outside their circle of friends and family; therefore not having the opportunity to form the relationships that can be important support structures for all college students. It is these relationships that can lead to greater levels of engagement and success (Tinto, 2003).

The process of applying for an obtaining financial aid is another navigation-related barrier that can affect underrepresented student success. Underrepresented students often find the process confusing and are unaware of the requirements imposed by institutional and governmental entities (Long & Riley, 2007; Dynarski, 2002). The financial aid application process is highly complex and can be extremely confusing, even for families that have experience navigating the systems of higher education (Dynarski, 2002; Kane, 1999). For those that are first-generation college attendees, understanding the various terms and conditions of the
state and federal financial aid systems and their processes can be extremely challenging (Kane). For example, expected family contribution, commonly known as EFC, is alone a highly complex construct that is also an essential facet in determining the amount of aid a student receives. However, it is very difficult to know, or even estimate, in advance of completing the process of applying for and receiving the packaging of aid just what the expected family contribution is – and to explain to a student and their family what it is (Kane).

In addition to challenges understanding the terms of financial aid, underrepresented students, especially those that are first-generation college attendees, can have unawareness of the time required to complete the financial aid process. For example, the free application for federal student aid, also known as the FASFA forms, must be filed by a specific date in order to have aid available by the start of semester. Inexperienced students are often not aware of the rather strict financial aid timeframes and deadlines (Garcia, 2010; Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin & Castro, 2010). Often these inexperienced students are underrepresented students that most need the financial resources in order to attend college. Studies have found that underrepresented students enter college --literally beginning the first day of college-- believing that financial aid can be applied for as classes are commencing, and then have no readily available means to pay for their classes (Garcia; Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin & Castro). The lack of available financing becomes a significant barrier to underrepresented students persisting in higher education. Conversely, support from family members that have college experience is an asset for many non-minority students. This support includes funding for the student that has been accumulated for many years by knowledgeable parents; and it includes helping the student to navigate the financial aid systems in order to optimize the government and institution provided funding (Alexander et al., 2007; Heller, 2002; Kane, 1999). In fact, empirical research suggests
that students who have parents with higher education experience are more successful in college (for example, Crisp & Nora, 2010), and those students who have access to financing sufficient to fund their college education—in other words they do not enter college not knowing how to pay for their education—are more likely to persist to the completion of their educational goals (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Crisp & Nora, 2010). It is often the underrepresented student who enters college while also having to work in order to pay for their education and support a family, and the uncertainty of ability to finance college for these students creates barriers to success (Alexander et al., 2007).

**Institutional factors affecting underrepresented student success.** The factors described in the previous sections affecting underrepresented student success in higher education, including navigation and financing, are referred to as environmental pull factors by Crisp and Nora (2010), as they are influences on the student’s education that arise as result of the environments under which the student must interact. The environment of the student includes the ways of knowing and believing that originate domestically (at home), and from the student’s experiences with the campus environment (Crisp & Nora, 2010, p. 190). Another influence of underrepresented student success that emanates from the literature is the institution itself. Essentially, there is evidence the staff of institutions of higher education, including community colleges, often does not account for the unique experiences, challenges and other characteristics of the underrepresented student as they enter and matriculate through college. The lack of accommodation can create a negative pull on underrepresented student success. Moreover, there is also evidence indicating that when college staff does account for the unique background of the underrepresented student, the student has a better chance of being successful (Jenkins, 2007).
other words, the literature reveals there is evidence of a relationship between the people of the institution and its services, and underrepresented student success.

Many underrepresented students, according to the prevailing scholarship, often enter the community college underprepared (Bailey & Morest, 2006), and overwhelmed by the size, scope and complexity of the institution. Most students are directed, upon initial entry, to counselors and orientation staff – those who are tasked to help guide the students through the physical and virtual structures of the college. However, underrepresented students can encounter counselors and other staff members who do not successfully guide them through the processes of the college (Alexander et al., 2007; Hagedorn, Perrakis & Maxwell, 2007). They encounter staff that leave them frustrated and feeling unsure of their ability to pursue coursework in higher education. Underrepresented students can encounter community college staff that does not encourage them to pursue a rigorous course of study. Clark (1960) argued that community college students could encounter a phenomenon he labeled as “cooling out” (Clark, 1960, p. 574) where students were redirected to vocational programs - it seems that a similar approach can yet be encountered by underrepresented students in the current context of the community college. For example, Hagedorn, Perrakis & Maxwell, 2007, using data collected from a series of focus group interviews of students, faculty and administrators at the campuses of the Los Angeles Community College system, a highly diverse college district of California, found that counselors did not pursue continuous engagement with students, and/or attempted to dissuade students from pursuing transfer to elite institutions – institutions such as the University of California (UC) system. One student stated: “The process of getting in to see a counselor is difficult. [When a student does get an appointment with a counselor] there is no follow-up and there is no encouragement to come back and see them” (p. 45). Another explained that when she asked a
counselor for information on the UC system, the community college staff member attempted to interest her in attending a different college – a college that had lower admissions standards and was less prestigious than the UC system. The student came away from that meeting unsure of her ability and feeling lost. She said “The counselor made me want to cry. They should be more encouraging” (p. 45).

In addition to negative encounters with academic counselors, underrepresented students assert that faculty and administrative staff can make assumption that they are not committed to succeeding in college (Alexander et al., 2007; Gardenhire-Crooks, Callado, Marting, Castro, 2010). Often, as the literature reveals, underrepresented students believe they are cast, are stereotyped, as students who are not serious about pursuing a rigorous program of study – practitioners seem, even yet, to assume that underrepresented students belong in vocational education. Underrepresented students believe that community college staff can target them as future academic underachievers and, as previously stated, direct them towards less rigorous programs. The students stated their appearance, their ways of expressing themselves and their mannerisms, all of the things that make them unique, was a source of negative perception by members of the institution (Gardenhire-Crooks, Callado, Marting, Castro). They students stated that comments by the practitioners of the college, as well as the education and career advice given, made it evident they were not considered future scholars.

Importantly, the negative encounters by underrepresented students can directly impact student success. Underrepresented students who do not have positive experiences indicate that they are unlikely to develop strong relationships with faculty and staff (Breland, 2004). Males from underrepresented populations can be especially affected, as they are less likely to have relationships with faculty and staff than their majority counterparts (Gardenhire-Crooks, Callado,
Marting, Castro, 2010). As there is a rich body of scholarly literature on college persistence that indicates there is a connection between student success and engagement with the social and academic structures of the campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tino, 1987), it is likely weak relationships between underrepresented students and members of the campus community negatively impacts student success. Crisp and Nora (2010), who found that Latino student success was strongly influenced by attending a Latino Serving Institution (HSI), amplify the influence of underrepresented student engagement with the campus community. Their study found evidence that Latino students attending an HSI were more likely to be successful than those who attended a PWI or other non-Latino serving institution. The implication is Latino students encountered a more welcoming environment at the HSI than at a campus of predominantly White students and staff, and the positive environmental conditions had a positive impact on their educational experiences. However, with support, underrepresented students can succeed at any institution. This finding is provided next.

Jenkins (2007), in a study that compared the policies, practices and cultures of two groups of community colleges, found that targeted support by community college staff and faculty for minority (underrepresented) students resulted in higher likelihood of success – a higher rate of completing their educational goals. The institutions creating the conditions for minority student success developed an inclusive environment for the students. They did so by providing specialized services to minority students that were designed to improve retention. Thus, “[minority] community college students are more likely to succeed at colleges where they are made to feel welcome and where there are support services and programs specifically designed for them” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 954) – the programs and services can include in-depth orientations, proactive advising, early warning systems, and well-organized academic support services. Indeed
it seems there is the possibility of positive influences that originate out of meaningful relationships between underrepresented students and institution staff.

In addition to the people of the institution creating negative or positive pull on underrepresented student success, there is evidence that the institution’s resources could be a factor as well. Specifically, there is evidence that urban community colleges often lack the funding for programs, services and technology that would positively influence retention. For example, Hagedorn, Perrakis and Maxwell (2007) found the Los Angeles Community College district has funding shortages that prevent them from hiring qualified counselors, admissions advisors, career and transfer center staff, skilled tutors, and modern equipment for the writing centers and computer labs. The result is that those who most need skilled support, the underrepresented students who often enter the community college underprepared, do not get it. Moreover, the lack of skilled campus resources has led to erroneous advise being given to students and impacting their ability to complete their goals, and students being placed into classes that they are less likely to successful complete – like online classes for students that don’t own a computer (Garcia, 2010; Hagedorn, Perrakis and Maxwell, 2007).

**Technology factors affecting underrepresented student success.** Another institutional-based environmental pull factor that surfaces out of the literature on underrepresented student success is technology. Access to and use of technology is yet an issue that affects the equitable opportunity to share in society’s resources for people in the United States. In general, underrepresented students are less likely to have access to modern technology and have less opportunity to use technology for meaningful educational experiences (Valadez & Duran, 2007). Additionally, the literature indicates that the technology gap can have a negative influence on underrepresented student success at the community college.
Community colleges, including urban campuses with large underrepresented student populations, can have significant groups of students without access to a computer and the Internet at home, forcing these students to obtain access to technology at the college campus – often via the campus-based computer laboratories (Hagedorn, Perrakis & Maxwell, 2007). Additionally, in an environment of limited access to technology for certain groups of people, institutions of higher education, including the community college, are making greater use of technology. For example, Garcia (2010) found that a barrier first-semester Latino students encountered at one community college was registering for classes. The institution had implemented an online (computer)-based registration system and the students that were inexperienced with technology struggled to get into appropriate class sections. For example, they were not able to determine the appropriated search criteria to find the classes they wanted. Moreover, the underrepresented students not only struggled with using the computer-based system, several had the mistaken perception that college had placed an impenetrable barrier between themselves and the institution. The underrepresented students interviewed for the study did not understand that they could yet get assistance from advisors, counselors and other staff members of the institution for the registration process – they did not know they could still register in person with a person helping them through the process. One result of the false perception was some students unknowingly registering for Internet-based classes. For one student, it was highly problematic, as she had no access to technology at home. She said: “I don’t even own a computer and I have been out of school so long, that even if I owned one I wouldn’t know how to operate [it]!” (Garcia, 2010, p. 843). The result of change to the structural systems of the college is students struggling to get into the classes that best positioned them to
successfully complete. Indeed the change constructs barriers for those who most need them removed.

Another technology-based success issue for underrepresented students is those that do not have access to a computer and the Internet at home, and therefore need to use the college labs in order to participate. Studies have found that often these facilities house computers that are inoperable (are in need of repair), have software that is out of date, contain viruses which affects the performance and reliability of the systems, and, simply, are old, slow and in need of replacement (Cattagni & Farris, 2001; Hagedorn, Perrakis & Maxwell, 2007; Valadez & Duran, 2007). In other words, the labs can be virtually unusable for the students. The findings of these studies suggest that lab-based access to technology is not a like substitute for home access. The problems include technological obsolescence, as well as hours of operation of the labs (at my college the labs close at 8pm), and other factors, which can render students incapable of effectively participating in their classes and therefore create a negative impact on academic performance. Primarily, the introduction of technology is an indication of structural change that requires the students to adapt and conform. Underlying this thread is the prospect of the institution having ideas about the student – their ability to engage and take on the role of ideal student. Practitioner knowledge seems to include presumption of a set a certain capabilities. Perhaps practitioners do think that all students come with a computer.

The literature on underrepresented student success essentially indicates that the problem is highly complex; it operates on many layers. It also indicates that students, all students, come to college with unique experiences, unique knowledge and ways of thinking and knowing. The literature provides support for the argument that practitioners of higher education need to have
knowledge of their students, their uniqueness, in developing their practices; which is the basis of this investigation.

The Community College

This section of the review of literature provides the rational for locating my study at the community college. While many institution types could have been deemed appropriate for conducting a study of the success phenomenon at a college serving a large number of underrepresented students, such as an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) or an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution), the community college was found to be an ideal choice for many reasons. These reasons are brought forward in this section.

The evolving mission of the community college: access for whom and to what? The community college’s open access mission is often described in a policy-related context, where national, state and local legislators helped to position the 2-year public institution as the entry point to higher education for anyone wanting the opportunity to participate in higher education. The mission, formed by policymakers and influential leaders, reflects the institution’s egalitarian orientation of the 2-year public institution (Dougherty, 1994). The mission reflects a willingness to accept anyone through its open doors, independent of race, ethnicity, social class, economic status or academic ability.

The nearly universal mission of open access was not an initial function of the community college. The institution, conceived in the early 1900’s, was chartered to relieve four-year schools of the burden of providing lower division courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In other words, at its inception the primary function of the community college was to provide the foundation for baccalaureate-seeking students in order to allow the university to concentrate on upper division education and research (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The first community
college, Joliet Junior College, intended to support institutions like the University of Chicago, still stands today (and still named Joliet Junior College). While there were many influential contributors that led to the present day comprehensive mission of the community college, credit is often given to the Truman Commission of 1947. Established at the behest of then President Harry Truman, the commission positioned the 2-year public institution as the gateway to higher education (Bragg, 2001). The commission would ultimately be credited with shifting the American society towards equalized opportunity, and doing so by providing expanded access to higher education through an institution that offered convenient locations, a lower cost of attending, and choice to students with an ever-expanding array of programs of study. The American community college has continued to evolve over the decades, and through socioeconomic, political, and a myriad of other forces the institution has been transformed from a relatively insignificant entity to one of tremendous influence in American’s system of higher education (Dougherty, 1994). As the community college’s mission has evolved, so too has its place in higher education.

The community college grows up. Community college leaders, over time, have been successful in evolving and transforming the mission, and through functions like academic preparation, vocational education, transfer (to four year colleges) and community outreach, the college has firmly been connected to the American principals of democratic equality and an equal opportunity (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Dowd, 2003). The community college serves, through a wide array of programs and services, individuals of all ages and ethnicities. The literature supports this argument in many ways; enrollment is one. As the first decade of the 21st century came to a close, the community college is the choice of nearly 11.5 million students, representing 44% of all undergraduates and over 50% of all students in higher education.
Moreover, according to the National Center for Education Statistic’s (2012) 2010 fall enrollment survey of degree-granting institutions, the community colleges provide access to 39% of all African American undergraduates, and 50% of Latinos. Also of significance, not only does the community college serve approximately half of all higher education students in the United States, the institution has experienced rapid growth over a relatively short period of time. The colleges have had to increase capacity in response to ever increasing demand for the expansive set of services it provides. Specifically, the 11.5 million students that were enrolled in 2-year colleges in the fall term of 2008 represented a more than two-fold increase over a thirteen year period as enrollments stood at approximately 5.5 million in 1995 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). Perhaps just as important as the overall enrollment statistics, and further support for the significant contribution of the community college, is that the institution is often the portal of access to higher education for those who leave the secondary education system without the credentials required by institutions with selective admissions standards (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Perin & Charron, 2006). More specifically, the community college is the institution which “often [serves] individuals who would not otherwise participate in higher education” (Bragg, 2001, p. 94). Indeed the two-year institution is often the college of choice for students on the margin of higher education (Kane & Rouse, 1999); those who have, for many reasons, been historically excluded from the opportunity to obtain the credentials which creates access to semiprofessional and professional occupations, better pay, greater well-being for the student and her/his family (for example, see Nora, 2003; Swail, 2000; Bailey & Morest, 2006). Importantly, the students on the margins are often diverse students, or students of color, who have historically been excluded from having access to many of the advantages higher education has to offer (Aragon & Kose,
The importance of the community college in providing access to underrepresented students is examined next.

**Underrepresented student access to higher education.** The community college of the 21st century is indeed an institution with a highly diverse student population – it has evolved into an important point of access, as provided above, for people who are on the margins of higher education: underrepresented students. Underrepresented students comprise approximately 30% of all community college enrollments (―American Association of Community Colleges,‖ 2012) – see Figure 1 below. In states with higher populations of underrepresented students, like California, the enrollment percentages reveal the significance of the community college in providing access to those that are traditionally disadvantaged (―American Association of Community Colleges,‖ 2012). In states like these, the importance of the community college for underrepresented students is seen in the enrollment patterns, where White students make up but 37% of the population of students – see Figure 2 below. In Illinois, a state with a comprehensive community college system, the enrollments mirror national averages. The enrollments also align with the state’s population. There, approximately 30 percent of community college attendees are underrepresented (see Figure 3 below), which approximates the state’s population of African Americans and Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Indeed more than one half of African Americans and Latinos who become students in America’s system of higher education attend a community college at one time or another (Bryant, 2001), rendering the community college a significant source of access to those historically who have been denied the opportunity to participate. Moreover, the community college provides underrepresented students with access to a variety of programs, which is briefly discussed next.
The community college, with its comprehensive mission, provides, as previously discussed, access to a wide array of programs and services. In terms of credentials, the community college provides opportunity for the student to obtain a certificate, an associate’s degree, or provide the initial portions of the coursework required to obtain a bachelor’s degree. The bachelor’s degree continues to be a valuable commodity for the individual as it affords access to professional occupations that otherwise may not be available (McMahon, 2009). For underrepresented students, the community college occupies a vital position by providing an affordable, convenient choice to those seeking college credentials. Indeed as the cost of college continues to exponentially rise, the two-year publically funded institution of higher education often becomes the only choice for low-income students (Baum & Ma, 2007); and many of the low-income students are also underrepresented students (Harper, 2006). In fact, the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) reports that the majority of African American and Latino undergraduate students in the United States enroll at the community college.

**Underrepresented student outcomes in the community college.** In the previous sections of chapters one and two, I have presented evidence that underrepresented students struggle to complete their objectives in higher education, including the community college, at greater rates than do White students. I add this section to briefly consolidate the evidence of the completion challenge for underrepresented students at the community college, in order to further illuminate the issue and to provide concise contextualization of the issue. This section provides evidence of the need to further study the success challenges at the community college.

There has been significant attention applied to the challenge of community college students completing their educational goals. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), in their extensive review of the literature on the ways in which college affects students, found that (all) students who begin
college at a two-year institution are 15 to 20 percent less likely to complete their bachelor’s degree that those who begin at a four-year college. The success challenge extends to underrepresented students who attend a community college. Bailey, Jenkins & Leinback (2005), in a review of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data (IPEDS) and Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) data from the National Center for Educational Statistics’ (NCES), found that African American and Latino students attending the community college are “underrepresented among those earning credentials relative to their rates of undergraduate enrollment in higher education (p.11)” and, specific to the community college, are “underrepresented among associate degree earners at community colleges (p.11)”. They found that, for example, African America students at the community college are less than half as likely as a White student to earn an associate’s degree. Moreover, White students are much more likely to transfer from the community college to a four-year institution – thereby more likely to have the opportunity to pursue their bachelor’s degree and other forms of advanced education.

Alfonso, Bailey and Scott (2005) also found that ethnicity was a significant factor for students who failed to reach their educational goals at the community college. Specifically, they found that African Americans in associate’s degree programs at the community college were less likely to reach their education goals than other students.

In closing this section, it is acknowledged the literature provides evidence of benefit of the community college for students of all ethnicities (for example, Cohen & Brawer, 2008). There is also evidence that the community college provides opportunity for many that would not otherwise have one. However, it also is virtually inarguable that improvement in the equitable opportunity to complete educational goals is needed for students who have been traditionally on the margins of higher education.
Summary of the community college literature. In summary, the literature on community colleges describes a college that has responded to the changing needs of the American Society. As higher education has become an essential component of access to better jobs, the two-year institution of higher education born in the United States has led the effort to provide access to an
increasingly diverse population of college-goers – the community college provides access to those seeking to join the ever growing group people who have access to a better life. However, there are significant student success challenges at the community college. These challenges particularly affect students that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education. The challenges particularly affect African American and Latino students. There is a need to further explore the success challenge at the community college. The community college became a logical choice for locating my study.

**Summary of the Literature**

What practitioners know and how they know is at the core of this study. Therefore, the funds of knowledge framework, a framework focused on the acquisition of knowledge or know-how became an appropriate foundation for this study. The funds of knowledge framework essentially indicates that the skills and knowledge needed to productively participate in a social environment are developed and mediated by the environment itself. For the practitioners of higher education, the environment of the college provides, according to the framework, a powerful influence on obtaining the knowledge needed to do the job. In other words, the knowledge needed by faculty,
the practitioners serving in the role of instructor, to teach students is largely constructed out of the social environment of the college. Importantly, the knowledge constructed out of the college’s social environment is likely to be based on an ideal of student. The funds of knowledge of the practitioner are likely to include perceptions of whom and what the college student should be. These perceptions of students are likely to be oriented towards the dominant discourse, or the dominant paradigm (Bensimon, 2007). The dominant paradigm characterizes the student as the engaged, self-motivated actor and instructional practices are likely to be developed using the lens of the ideal student – instructional practices that are more pervasively using technology.

Importantly, funds of knowledge that is developed based on the dominant paradigm could exacerbate the success challenges for underrepresented students. The practitioners that most often interact with the student and therefore play an important role in their success are the faculty. Therefore, it is important to learn more about faculty knowledge in developing the instructional practices that are likely to influence success for all of their students; including the success of underrepresented students that has been a persisting challenge.

The literature reveals that underrepresented student success in higher education continues to be a significant problem. There are many factors affecting underrepresented student success in higher education, however, three prominent factors surfaced from the literature that are categorized in this review. These factors are: academic, navigational, and institutional. The most significant academic factor is the inability of secondary education to adequately prepare all students for college. Underrepresented students disproportionately require remedial education in college, thereby embarking on a path where the likelihood of succeeding is diminished. In addition to academic factors, underrepresented students can be challenged to navigate social environments constructed by the dominant culture. They encounter unfamiliar rules and
processes. Higher education is one such social environment that includes processes that create issues for underrepresented students. Processes that include: admissions, registration and financial aid. The final factor is institutional. Practitioners tend not to be familiar with the unique experiences of underrepresented students and therefore their practices and their actions can create a negative pull on success for these students. It is when underrepresented students, as with all students, encounter an environment that is inclusive and accommodating, then the possibilities of success follows.

Finally, the literature on the community college was reviewed and presented. The community college is an institution that has risen in status amongst the many types in the system. The community college of today is an institution of relatively expansive mission, of open access, of rapidly expanding enrollments, and of a college that aligns with the ideals of a democracy – equal opportunity for all. Indeed the community college is considered the portal of access to higher education for anyone seeking an opportunity. However, the community college, it can be argued, has not provided equal opportunity, as there is evidence of inequality in the rate of achievement for the students. There is a persistent achievement gap at the community college that needs to be pursued.
Chapter 3
Research Methods

Introduction

This study seeks to add to the scholarship on underrepresented student success by exploring faculty perceptions of funds of knowledge, and, how the knowledge originates. Funds of knowledge, as it relates to faculty and this study, is the socially constructed knowledge and skills needed to be an instructor at a community college. It relates to the knowledge that influences the ways that students experience the community college. This chapter outlines the design and methods used to investigate the research questions of the study, which are:

1) What are community college faculty perceptions and ideas of essential practice-related knowledge and in what ways is the student included?

2) What are the influences and experiences of community college faculty as they acquire their funds of knowledge?

The Qualitative Methodology of Inquiry

Methodology forms the basis on which an inquiry, an empirical study, is planned, designed and carried out (Schwandt, 1997). Methodology is, according to Guba (1990), the foundation on which the search for knowledge is conducted, and provides the researcher with guidance for the entire process of conducting a study. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) argue that methodology “refers to the general logic and theoretical perspective for a research project” (p. 31), and that qualitative research is a naturalistic methodology for conducting empirical studies that have a purpose of adding to the base of knowledge of a particular phenomenon. Conversely, the methods, according to Bogdan and Biklen, are the “specific techniques” (p. 31) used by the researcher in conducting the study, techniques such as surveys, interviews and observations.
The naturalistic approach is where the researcher seeks to understand more about phenomena in the context in which they occur – such as "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). The qualitative researcher conducts an inquiry into meaning using inductive analysis “where abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 6). It is a methodology that stands in contrast to quantitative research, which attempts to make deductive predictions through statistical analysis and generalizations of findings (Hoepfl, 1997). LeCompte and Preissle (1993) provide a considered summary of the purpose of qualitative research, arguing it seeks to create knowledge through comprehensive understanding of individual or group experiences and their perceptions of the experiences. For it is perceptions that arise out of the way in which individuals and groups make sense of their lives – perceptions that surface out of the way in which people make meaning of the world (Bogdan & Biklin). Moreover, since human behaviors are influenced by the setting in which the behavior happens, context is critical in qualitative research. Specifically, the qualitative study is conducted as much as possible in the setting in which the experiences occur in order for the researcher to interpret phenomena in the environment of the participants (Bogdan & Biklen). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assert “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self” (p. 3). It is these methods used for qualitative research that provide rich, detailed, descriptions and narratives that reflect the lived experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
The present study intended to add to the scholarship on the phenomenon of underrepresented student success, by spending time in the environment where underrepresented students go to learn, and with the people responsible to support them in the learning process. This study sought to understand more about the ways in which community college faculty develop the knowledge needed to teach students – to understand more about the social development of the knowledge needed to practice, and understand more about the context in which knowledge is developed. Moreover, I did not take the approach of collecting numerical data and performing statistical analysis in order to generalize results across a homogeneous student population that likely does not exist, but I did so through the voices of the faculty – those who are engaged daily with students who often struggle to complete their educational goals, those who have perpetually been left on the margins of higher education. I intended to obtain an in-depth understanding of the complexities of contextually developed knowledge and its influence on students, especially underrepresented students, an area that has been principally ignored.

Case Study Research Design

There are, as with other methodologies, many options at the researcher’s disposal for conducting a qualitative study – appropriate selection from the available options is essential in order to design a study that addresses the research question. Creswell (2007) provides for five approaches in qualitative inquiry: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study. This investigation took a case study approach, which according to Merriam (2002) “is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon, or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community” (p. 8). Stake (1995) asserts that qualitative case study researchers are intent on the unique characteristics and experiences of the individual case
or cases, and how they act and react to their surroundings, for context matters in the exploration of the case.

For this study, my intent was to explore the phenomenon of underrepresented student success by examining the experiences of those who are largely responsible for creating a productive, socially just, learning environment for many of the students who enter higher education: the faculty of the community college. I intended to learn more about the phenomenon by focusing on those not only responsible for the classroom, but those who may have knowledge gaps about their students – those, like me, who continue to evolve the ways in which education is delivered, and may not have always considered all of our students in doing so. For the present study, each selected faculty (more on the selection process is provided below) is a case; each faculty is a voice in understanding more about underrepresented student success by describing their perceptions and ideas of essential knowledge – what they know about being an instructor, how they learned it, and its inclusion of students.

Becker (1968) provides additional clarity on when to use case study that also lent support for its use for this investigation. He argues case study is used “to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process” (p. 233). According to Becker, the case study could enhance our understanding of the norms of the social environment, and, perhaps more importantly, could increase our understanding of the ways in which these norms may exert influence on a particular phenomenon. It is these clarifying factors provided by Becker that render case study a natural choice for the present study, as I intended to explore the ways in which the social structure and other contextual factors may inform the funds of knowledge of those who exert influence on student success.
For the present study, a multiple case study approach was taken. Multiple case studies afford the opportunity to explore a phenomenon within a natural setting through the collection of data from several cases (Yin, 2009). Scholars often regard data collected and analyzed through multiple cases as more trustworthy than data collected in a single case method. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue “by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings” (p. 29). Yin argues a theoretical framework should be used in the process of selecting the cases in order to provide a basis for predicting similarities and differences in the findings – in order to strengthen the findings with multiple perspectives.

For the present study, the funds of knowledge framework is the basis for exploring the research questions that focus on the composition of faculty knowledge, and the ways in which it develops. As argued by Moll (2005), the funds of knowledge are expected to arise primarily out of exposure to the social environment. Exposure to, or experience in, the social environment becomes a theoretical basis of defining the cases that are expected to produce similar and contrasting findings, and is explored, along with other factors, further in the next section.

**The cases and the unit of analysis.** There are several essential elements that must be addressed in developing a case study design. The first is to establish or to define the cases. For this study of faculty development of their funds of knowledge, there are several factors that provided guidance for defining the cases. First, the funds of knowledge framework, which asserts that faculty are likely to be influenced by the social environment in developing their instructional practices, helped to narrow the focus of the study to full-time (often referred to as tenure-track) faculty, or those who are more likely to be consistently engaged with the environment - opposed
to adjunct faculty. Studies have found that part-time, or adjunct, faculty are more likely to incur limited institutional integration and therefore lower levels of socialization into the environment (Schuetz, 2002). Second, since the study is focused on the underrepresented student, it was important to focus the study on faculty who have experience with underrepresented students, at an institution with a fairly significant population of underrepresented students, in order to locate the study at a site where underrepresented students are likely to attend. In terms of appropriately locating the study within the research site, the researcher inquired with staff and administrators and determined classes that tended to enroll underrepresented students. For example, developmental education classes are often overrepresented with African American and Latino students (Bailey, Jeong, Cho, 2010). Another example of classes that could bring diverse enrollments includes gateway or gatekeeper classes, which are the initial college-level courses in math and English that many students must complete in order to complete an associate’s or bachelor’s degree (Clery, 2011; Jenkins, Jaggars & Roska, 2009), as well as other courses that Riverside College identifies as tending to encourage underrepresented enrollment. It is with these factors the cases for the study became full-time community college faculty who instruct at a college with a diverse student population and have the opportunity to teach classes that tend to have underrepresented students enroll.

The next element in developing case study design is to determine the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is essential in order to establish specific boundaries for each case (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2009). Merriam (2002) argues the unit of analysis “characterizes the case study” (p.8); essentially, it is what makes the study a case study. The unit of analysis uses a well-defined characteristic of the case in order to focus the analysis, and is selected because it is typical, atypical, or has other specific traits that are important to the case. Yin (2009) argues that
determining the appropriate unit of analysis begins with the examining the research question(s). Essentially, the unit of analysis should derive from the research questions and should support the process of maintaining clear focus of the case, or, as Yin argues, there is risk of the researcher unknowingly broadening the scope and losing track of the primary objectives early in the execution.

For the present study, the research questions focus on development of community college faculty’s socially constructed practice-related knowledge. The study is focused on the know-how of faculty that tends to derive from their exposure to the social environment of the institution, which is expected to influence their instructional practices. The social environment is expected to influence faculty ideas and perceptions of how they should teach students. Exposure, or experience in the environment of the institution, was an important factor embedded in each case that differentiates faculty and therefore the participants for this study - faculty with varying levels of experience became the unit of analysis for this study. The experience in, or exposure to, the environment may influence faculty knowledge and therefore their approach to instruction. For example, a faculty member who has had one year of contact with a social environment of the institution may have different experiences and different perceptions than the member with ten years. Support for this argument is found in the extant literature, which is replete with examples of experience and environment having influence on teaching and teaching practice. For example, Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000) argue that “outstanding teaching requires teachers to have a deep understanding of the subject matter…[expert] knowledge of effective strategies for working with students” (p. 188) – knowledge that is constructed over time and by learning to learn within the context of the educational environment. Chang, Lin and Song (2011) found that years of experience for higher education faculty had a positive influence on instructional
capabilities such as course design and learning assessment. Conversely, Kuh, Laird and Umbach (2004) found a negative relationship between faculty years of experience and effective teaching practices. Specifically, “the more years a faculty member has taught, the less likely he or she is to use active and collaborative learning activities…” (p. 29). It should be noted the Kuh, Laird and Umbach study did not account for faculty experiences with underrepresented students. Again, experience with or exposure to the social environment may influence faculty ways of thinking. For the present study, experience is defined exposure to the social environment as a full-time community college faculty member, and experience is expected to reveal similarities and differences in the socially constructed knowledge of the instructor.

Research Site

Tierney and Lincoln (1994) argue the site for a qualitative study should be selected because it possesses characteristics or qualities that relates to the “research interests of the inquirer” (p. 115). For this study, the site was selected using several specific criteria, including characteristics of the institution that are important to the study. First, as this study intends to add to the scholarship on underrepresented student success by exploring practitioner knowledge, a community college with a diverse student population is desired. The student population at the selected site, Riverside Community College (a pseudonym), is comprised of, as of Fall 2010, approximately 48% African American and Latino students (according to the state’s college board of higher education). Secondly, dissertation research is often conducted at a location that is convenient for the researcher (Tierney & Lincoln). This was a factor in my identifying potential research sites. The site selected is a public two-year college located in the Midwestern region of the United States that I can reach, typically, in less than 6 hours. Additionally, I contacted several
administrators of the college and received their support for the study; which will hopefully encourage participation and therefore create the conditions for a rich collection of narratives.

**Sample Selection**

This study employed purposeful sampling in order to select the participants. Academic department members, administrators and other knowledgeable staff, including the Center for Teaching Excellence (a group that supports innovative teaching methods at Riverside Community College), were contacted and asked to identify full-time faculty members that teach classes that tend to enroll underrepresented students. The administrators and department members associated with developmental, gateway and appropriate introductory classes were those initially contacted. They were also asked to identify faculty with varying levels of experience – experience is the unit of analysis for this study. In terms of delineation of experience, several studies on teaching experience reveals 5 years can be significant milestone in teacher development. For example, Chingos and Peterson (2010) found that instructor experience indeed was a positive influence on student learning that peaked at the 5-year mark. Chang, Lin and Song (2011) found that instructors with 5 or fewer years of teaching experience had lower perceptions of teaching efficacy – teaching efficacy was defined as the essential capabilities needed to influence student learning. Myers (2008) found female faculty with 5 or more years of experience exhibited greater propensity to utilize effective teaching practices; practices such as: talking with colleagues and connecting with campus experts (i.e. interacting with the social environment). Therefore, the people of Riverside Community College were asked to select faculty who have 5 years or less of experience (service time as a full time community college instructor), and to select faculty who have more than 5 years of experience. The list was used to invite faculty to participate in the study. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed by
asking those that have accepted the invitation to participate if they would like to identify other instructors that teach classes that are likely to be attended by underrepresented students.

All communication from the investigator indicated that participation was voluntary. All information about the study emphasized that participation was voluntary. All individuals were told and reassured in all communication that their participation was voluntary during the recruitment process.

**Data Collection Procedures**

While there are many considerations of qualitative data collection, Bogdan & Biklen (2006) argue that a primary factor is finding participants who can provide the researcher with data that relates to the study’s research questions. The primary research question, as well as the framework on which this study is grounded, was used in determining the case and the unit of analysis for this study. It was these essential elements of the study that led to a multiple case design where the cases are full time community college faculty at a college with a diverse student population who teach classes that tend to encourage enrollment of underrepresented students and have differing levels of experience. Moreover, the cases are participants who should be able to provide data that helps to answer the research questions.

The sample size for a qualitative study largely is determined by the phenomenon being investigated, as well as the objectives of the researcher for the study, and the available resources for the study (Patton, 2002). Patton argues: “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (p. 245). However, while he argues there are more important factors than sample size in qualitative research, Patton recommends that the researcher include enough samples in order provide
acceptable treatment of the phenomenon. For this study, which includes a research design of multiple cases of faculty with differing levels of experience, the researcher sought to include 5 faculty members with less experience (5 years or less), and 5 faculty with more experience (more than 5 years of experience), for a total of 10 participants, in order to afford the opportunity to fully explore the experiences and knowledge of each one. It should be noted I was prepared to expand the sample size if the data had not revealed multiple constructions of reality – different perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The approval of the University of Illinois’ College of Education Internal Review Board (IRB), which is tasked with insuring studies or investigations involving human subjects are conducted in a manner that causes no harm to the participants, was received prior to inviting anyone to participate. Moreover, the site for the research has an internal review process for studies that involve data collection and publication of findings. The local review process was followed in order to gain approval.

An invitation letter that describes the study and its procedures was sent to each identified candidate for participation (see Appendix A). An informed consent document was given to participants who agreed to participate prior to the first interview, which explained their rights and protections. The participants were required to sign the consent document prior to any form of data collection. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to obtain data that addressed the research questions and provided flexibility to explore knowledge and ideas of the participant that may have otherwise gone uncovered in a restricted form of data collection (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interview questions are provided in Appendix C. The interviews were conducted in the participants’ workspace in order for the researcher to learn as much as possible about the participant environment, and to locate the study
in the context of the phenomenon. Document review was also employed as a collection method. Specifically, faculty was asked to provide a current course syllabus, and one from several years prior, for the same course, in order to look for changes, or evolution, in their practices. Additionally, data was collected via classroom observation, and observation of faculty professional development workshops. For those that consented to classroom observation, I visited the participant’s classrooms at least once in order to observe their instructional approach first-hand. For the professional development workshops, I unobtrusively observed sessions intended, according to a Riverside College Center for Teaching Excellence brochure, to help faculty to “create, explore, and collaborate on innovative, high-quality, student-centered teaching methods”. Lastly, I gathered data on institutional context by examining the college’s website for historical information, as well as information on their stated mission, their strategies, and their foci. The researcher also collected institutional context data at the college – through the people of the campus, the physical campus itself – the buildings, the classrooms, the way they look and feel.

Quality and Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are the criteria for the naturalist researcher to use in producing empirical scholarship that can be trusted. The idea of trust goes towards establishing “findings of the inquiry [that] are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Qualitative researchers, in the social constructivist worldview of constructed and contextual meaning (Creswell, 2007), use these criteria to develop trustworthy research in place of the positivist criteria of internal validity (replaced with credibility), external validity (replaced
with transferability), reliability (replaced with dependability), and objectivity (replaced with confirmability).

Credibility places upon the researcher the requirement to demonstrate that multiple constructions of reality have been gathered and reconstructed in a way that they are “credible to the constructors…” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). In other words, the researcher has collected data that contains more than one view of reality and she/he has (inductively) assembled and integrated the views (realities) in such a way that the participants recognize and agree with the reformulation. Techniques to establish credibility include: 1) the researcher spending an extended time in the field—the authors specifically refer to prolonged engagement and persistent observation—in order to, for example, detect what Eisner (1975) refers to as pervasive qualities, or the qualities that really matter; 2) the triangulation of data through the use of multiple/many investigators and the use of theories, sources, or trusted methods in order to ground the research; 3) the use of peer debriefing with those who have experience and knowledge of research methodology and methods being employed by the researcher; 4) the search for and use of negative cases; 5) referential adequacy (see Eisner, 1975), which is achieved by electronically storing the data; 6) and, “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314), member checks, where data, interpretations and findings are reviewed with the participants of the study.

Transferability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), requires the reader to be able to apply, or transfer, the findings of a study to their situation—to their context. Morrow (2005) argues transferability is enhanced when the researcher provides a high level of study-related context for the reader. Included in the contextual information should be, as much as possible, information about: self (the researcher as the instrument); environment (context) under which the
research was conducted; processes used for the study; participants of the study; and, relationship of the researcher with the participants

Dependability goes to the extent the processes of conducting the study can be reliably repeated. More specifically, Gasson (2003) argues that, in order to have the quality of replication, the study should be conducted with consistency over time and with the empirically tested processes and techniques of data analysis and interpretation (p. 94). Dependability is accomplished through documenting the research design and keeping an audit trail of the methods, procedures and processes as well as the final product of the study. Researchers familiar with the naturalistic method of inquiry then examine the audit trail document. It is also maintained for future reference.

Confirmability goes to the extent the data, interpretations, and findings of the study are “grounded in events rather than the inquirer’s personal constructions” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 325). In other words, the study should be a product of the phenomenon and not the researcher’s beliefs, experiences or biases. Confirmability requires the reader is able to determine the findings of the study are a reflection of the people who participated. Confirmability attempts to mitigate the issue that research is rarely entirely objective – that the lens of the researcher is likely to color the results in some ways. The study having this characteristic is more likely to be grounded in data that reflects participant’s perspectives.

Several strategies from the aforementioned criteria were used for this study in order to ensure trustworthiness. First, with regard to credibility, I debriefed with my dissertation director after data collection and analysis. I also conducted member checks, where interview data was reviewed with the participants of the study. I have stored the data on electronic file systems to be retained for a period of three years. Triangulation of data provides the opportunity for evidence
convergence from multiple sources. Through the use of multiple data collection methods, the validity of one source of evidence can be evaluated against other sources. Studies that use only one source of data are more vulnerable to errors associated with that specific method.

Triangulation was achieved for the present study through three forms of data collection: interview, document review and observation.

Second, with regard to transferability, I provide information about myself in a section of this chapter; and provided information about the study participants as well as the environment under which the study is conducted. Third, dependability is sought through documenting the research design in this manuscript and therefore keeping records of the methods, procedures and processes used for the study. Fourth, in addressing confirmability, I do so through many of the aforementioned actions to achieve trustworthiness, including: member check and peer debrief, as well as information about the participants and me.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis involves the process of organizing, arranging and integrating data into manageable components in order to arrive at one or more findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Data interpretation refers to the process developing ideas about the findings and relating them to the current scholarship. Optimally, the interpretation phase involves relating the findings to theory or a framework, and making new meaning out of them. However, the process is not a momentous event; it is not something that flashes before the researcher and then is over in a minute, an hour or even a day. The process, according to Stake (1995): “is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71). In other words, it starts very early in the research process, and it does not end until the final word is written.
Merriam (2002) argues that the framework or the theory that grounds the study is an important tool to use for analysis and interpretation. The theory supplies the researcher with the ability to rationalize the approach to collection and developing coherent findings that build on the scholarship of a particular phenomenon. For this study, the funds of knowledge framework is the lens that was used to analyze and interpret data in order to develop new meaning on underrepresented student success. The funds of knowledge framework was used in the exploration of the development of faculty practice-related knowledge – the knowledge used to instruct students. The framework indicates faculty knowledge is likely to be socially constructed - constructed within the confines of the college environment. Therefore, their practice-related knowledge is likely to include ideas and perceptions that resonate from within the social environment – ideas that reflect the norms of the college. Therefore, my analysis was conducted with the funds of knowledge concepts of socially constructed knowledge in mind. In other words, I have some predetermined, very general, ideas about knowledge construction originating from theory that will be tested against the data. The next section provides elaboration on the approach I will take for analysis and interpretation.

**The search for patterns.** For the qualitative researcher, the search for meaning is often a search for consistent regularities in the data that can be grouped or classified (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Stake, 1995). The regularities, or patterns, can consist of the reappearance of certain words, phrases or behaviors. It is from these patterns that important meaning is developed. According to Stake (1995): “We can look for patterns immediately while we are reviewing documents, observing, or interviewing. Sometimes we find significant meaning in a single instance but usually the important meanings will come from reappearance, [from patterns]…” (p. 78). Stake refers to single instance, the non-pattern approach, as direct interpretation of data from
the source. He refers to the patterned approach, where recurrence occurs, as categorical aggregation. Each, he argues, are strategic approaches to developing new meaning in case study research.

Bernard and Ryan (2010) assert that “repetitions” (p.56) in the ideas of particular people provide ability to learn more about ways thinking within a culture that control the behaviors of its members. It is in the repetition of ideas that leads us to the discovery of themes that are essential cultural elements that guide behaviors – that guide ways of thinking and knowing that influence how we act. It was through the repetition of ideas that themes were constructed for this study.

An often-used method, which was employed for this study, of classifying and organizing the patterns is by developing a coding scheme. A code involves placing a tag, perhaps an abbreviation or symbol, to a group of words – to an identified pattern (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Bogdan and Biklen (2006) provide a stepwise approach to coding: 1) search the data for regularities and patterns; 2) write down words and phrases to represent these regularities found in the data; 3) these words and phrases represent codes, and are organized in order to assist the researcher with interpretation.

Developing codes can occur before, during or after data collection. Creswell (2007) asserts that, in social sciences, researchers tend to allow codes to emerge. They tend to develop codes as the data is being collected and after it is collected, as opposed to predetermining codes. However, Creswell also asserts there is value in developing codes in advance, a preliminary set of codes that will evolve, in order to have ideas about major categories of data collection before beginning. For this study, where little is known about practitioner knowledge and the possible influences on student success, there were very few predetermined codes developed. Most coding
categories emerged from the data, during and after data collection. The emergent categories related to ideas and perceptions of practice-related knowledge, cultural aspects of the institution, and others not considered prior to data collection.

**The Role of the Researcher**

The researcher in qualitative studies is the instrument through which data flows and therefore creates a highly variable entity in the process. A primary criticism of qualitative research is the humanistic factor that both must be present to conduct the study, and can inject a myriad of undesirable biases and therefore threats into the study (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). For example, the process of qualitative study requires the researcher delve deeply into the lives of the participants, however doing so can create a bond that, in turn, creates a threat to the elements of credibility and confirmability (Lincoln, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to address these issues, Patton (2002) recommends the researcher use reflexivity, which is the elucidation of assumptions, pertinent experiences, and theoretical position(s) that create the potential of unwanted influenced on the study. “Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective…” (Patton, 2002, p. 65). In other words, the research instrument is a human being who brings a lifetime of experiences and ways of knowing to a study and as such should be conscious of these potential influencers of the inquiry.

I, as the researcher for this study, in fact brought all of the humanistic trappings to this inquiry. I am a middle-aged White male who has occupied, my entire life, a chair at the table of middle class America. Professionally, I am an Information Technology administrator at a Midwestern U.S. community college. My college is situated in a relatively affluent set of communities – however, we, as is the case with many community colleges, have a relatively
diverse population of students that attend. From the statistics of the 2011 fall term published by the state college board, approximately 23% of the students of my college are African American or Latino. However, my College has the benefit of being located in where the wealth of many of the communities provides financial resources that other colleges do not enjoy. For example, my College is currently undergoing a multi-million dollar project to refurbish and remodel existing campus facilities, and to construct new.

It is from the world of self that I tried to be aware of and acknowledge the subjectivity that is grounded in my identity as a Midwestern middle-class educational technologist, who has spent many years searching for better ways of using computers. I came to Riverside College as the person who has been introducing change at my campus that may not be beneficial to all students – especially underrepresented students who may not have ubiquitous access to a computer. My identity in many ways created the potential for perception of bias and subjectivity as the reader could question my ability to objectively gather and synthesize data that involves underrepresented students. It could be argued that I do not have ability to understand the challenges of the underrepresented student; or that I would overly sympathize given my role of introducing change that may create negative impact. Moreover, my role as a community college administrator at an affluent college, my ethnicity, and perhaps my age did create initial tension with a couple of the participants. When I arrived for the first interview with participant six (chapter four provides an overview of each participant), for example, her facial expression conveyed surprise – she sort of exclaimed: “you are Michael?” I don’t think I was the researcher she was expecting for a study on underrepresented student success. It seemed to me for the first ten or fifteen minutes of the interview that participant six was guarded. I had the sense that she doubted my motives for the study (though I am not sure in what way – I just sensed a concern –
perhaps that she was wondering why she had agreed to participate). However, during the interview, participant six gradually became open to talking about anything, very open. I sensed she was very honest in conveying her experiences and ideas about essential knowledge, and about the student. Additionally, participants two and three also seemed initially surprised by the image of a middle-aged white male dressed in suit and tie when I arrived for the first time to meet and interview them. As with participant six, they both became very willing to talk at length about their experiences.

In terms of my background and its influence on the study, I argue that my experience as an educational technologist was a strength for this research project as my knowledge of faculty and faculty practices, as well as many years of working at a community college provided me with thorough understanding of the context in which the study was conducted. Moreover, my experience in the community college has provided the opportunity to work with students of all backgrounds – and it has been through these experiences that I have developed a deep desire to use my knowledge as well as the experience of being a doctoral student to help and support those that most need it. However, it is acknowledged that in my role of administrator of a community college in the same region as Riverside, I often struggled with critical analysis of the individual participants. My participants know who I am, where I work, and generally what I do. I struggled at times with honestly and candidly inserting my own ideas and opinions, as I was concerned of future contact and the impact that being, what I perceived, as overly critical of the people who so generously gave me their time. I often found myself using my advisor as a key resource in conducting data analysis and interpretation, and assessing my findings (to ensure impartiality).

I close this section with the acknowledgement that throughout the study I attempted to monitor my identity and ensure that I did not inject subjectivity into this study, as is attempted
by all naturalistic inquirers. As Peshkin (1993) argues, I tried to recognize and accommodate my subjectivities in order to ensure unbiased findings. I tried to ensure my findings were based on the lived experiences of the participants and not my own.

**Limitations**

There are many obvious limitations of this study. This section will describe a few of those that seem to be most significant. First, the unit of analysis, which again is a factor that helps to shape and/or frame the cases of the study, faculty experience, was expected to influence knowledge and therefore establish differentiation in their stories – faculty with greater experience were expected to have different knowledge and experiences than those with less. However, experience proved not to be very significant; as will be found in chapter five, experience surface only in one pattern of one theme. There are likely other factors that influence knowledge and experiences that were not identified in this study. For example, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational background are just a few of the factors that could influence faculty knowledge and were not identified in this study.

A second limitation is the study was conducted at a single community college and therefore raises concern that the findings and conclusions are strictly a function of the campus environment where the study is conducted. However, the community college selected for the study is highly diverse, and is representative of colleges of the state system. Readers of this study will need to be acutely aware of the limitations and account for the single institution approach when considering the findings and conclusions provided.

Another limitation is the study was conducted under a very limited engagement with the participants and their environment. According Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement affords the opportunity for collecting data that, ultimately, is more reliable and therefore
trustworthy. However, time restrictions and faculty availability, which was highly constrained, limited the time I could engage with the participants and their environment. To mitigate this limitation, I worked with advisors to set the number of participants, or cases, to a level that attempted to optimize data collection and findings.
Chapter 4

Research Context

It was the day of my first observation at Riverside Community College. I arrived later than planned, as it had taken longer than expected to navigate the roads leading to Riverside. I was annoyed. My first observation and I am late! Well, not really late, I was not as early as I wanted. I wanted time to walk around; I wanted time to take in my surroundings. I sat in the parking lot, taking a few deep breaths, and then made my way to the designated location to observe a faculty professional development session. I was dressed in khaki pants, a blue dress shirt and brown loafer-type shoes. I wanted to look somewhat professional...I am not sure if I accomplished the objective. The fall semester has just begun at the College; it seemed to me that there were students everywhere. One young woman caught my attention as she hurriedly made her way from the parking lot into the same building to which I was heading. She was trying to, sort of, run while carrying a load of books and wearing shoes that have those high back heals – they really looked uncomfortable. As I sat there for a moment...it occurred to me, as it has in the past that I always feel revitalized to see students coming back to campus. As a community college administrator I think it makes me feel needed.

The parking lots of Riverside, it seemed to me, are in need of attention. There are large patches of crumbling asphalt - many areas where the pavement suddenly gives way to an abyss (we call them pot-holes where I come from). My car, with a driver trying desperately to reach his destination, seemed to find every spot of damaged surface along the way. Unfortunately, colorful language occasionally ensued. The students, it seemed to me, were able to skillfully avoid the bad spots – I was impressed! I wondered why the surfaces were not better. I wondered if the college did not have the funding to repair them.
The buildings of Riverside all looked alike. Each is made of light brown brick, panels of steel painted white and large panes of dark tinted glass. The different materials are layered – first steel, then brick, and then glass. It reminded me of a layer cake. As I faced the buildings from the parking lot, I took a picture of one with my iPhone for future reference. Each building is identified with a letter of the alphabet. I headed for my letter. Though I had little time in advance of the observation, I managed to note the interior of the building is rather an eclectic combination of wood paneled walls, brick and tile – some of the walls that delineate the hallways are wood, some are brick; some are both. I noted at the time: “I am not sure I like the decor of this building.” There are a few chairs that line the hallways – they looked like they have had many occupants over the years. The chairs are perched on tiled floors. The tiles alternate between sections of white, and gray with black accent. It seemed to me the title was a good choice – solid, standing up to the many shoes that had crossed the surface. I wondered just how many shoes there had been. A lot I am sure…I then made my way up the stairs to the second floor for my first observation. I was excited to be at Riverside.

This chapter provides the context in which this study was conducted. The intent is to give the reader background on the area in which Riverside Community College is situated, as well as the college itself and its students. The chapter also provides an overview of each of the participants, their professional background and other aspects. I begin with an overview of the College's community – where the college is situated and who it serves.

The Community of Riverside

Riverside Community College is situated in the metropolitan area of a large urban city in the Midwestern United States. The area that makes up the College's district is described on a page of Riverside's website as geographically small. The district of Riverside, according to the
College's website, covers approximately 70 square miles, and provides access to higher education for 25 towns and villages. Much of the area is directly or indirectly adjacent to the city. Therefore, with this close proximity, while the location may be described as geographically small, there are a lot of people who call it home. Specifically, over 350,000 citizens are considered in-district to Riverside. In contrast, a community college in the northern central part of the state serves a district comprising 2000 square miles and approximately 145,000 people.

The streets leading to Riverside, from all directions, reflect the population density of the area. They are indeed highly utilized roads. While the area is rather unfamiliar to me, people from the College warned that traveling to and from the campus during prime time is an adventure. They were correct! During one trip to the College, traveling in a direction that was taking me towards the city, I counted 14 traffic lights in a two-mile section of road – I then wondered to myself why I was counting traffic lights. I addition to counting traffic lights, I managed to derive an approximation of my progress (or lack thereof). I noted that, by approximately 7:30am, it had taken me approximately 25 minutes to travel this two-plus mile stretch of concrete and asphalt. Cars seemed to occupy every inch of the path that would get me to Riverside. I jotted down, while stopped at a red light, in my notebook that laid in the car seat next to me: “How do people do this every day? Crazy!” A man in a nearby car appeared not very happy either – at least I was not alone in my misery.

The district served by Riverside is both well populated and diverse. First, in terms of ethnic composition, the College's district is made up of 55% Whites, 20% African Americans, and 15% Latino (Ellis & Enger, 2003). Moreover, the cities and villages of the district are very diverse in terms of socioeconomic standing. According to Ellis and Enger, 47% of the district's population reported income greater than $75,000. However, there are areas where family income is much
less. For example, using information from the websites of the cities, while one wealthy village of
the district advertised their citizens have an average household income of $105,000, another
nearby town reports the households of their constituents earn, on average, less than $40,000.
Additional evidence of the economic diversity comes from a Higher Learning Commission
(HLC) document prepared by Riverside Community College, where the HLC committee reports:
“The district served by Riverside Community College has a spectrum of economic, cultural and
racial diversity” (Riverside Community College, Higher Learning Commission Committee,
2010, p. 67). According to the 2000 census, community median incomes range from
approximately $89,000 to approximately $34,000” – a difference of $55,000. The areas leading
to Riverside highlighted the difference. At one point in my trip I stopped for coffee at a shopping
center that was filled with up-scale stores. At another point, I was in an area where a crumbling
building was marked condemned. I must admit, during an early visit to the College, I felt as if I
had entered a world to which I was unfamiliar. It was both exciting and discomforting.

The College

Riverside Community College was founded in the early 1960's, formed out of an
agreement amongst three townships; three that are still a part of its district. Initially, classes were
held in the rooms of area high schools. It is not unusual for a community college getting started
to not have its own facilities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). For Riverside, it was several years after
the College was founded that a groundbreaking ceremony was held in commemoration of
beginning construction on the first building of the College. More high school districts joined the
College's district over the course of the first decade of existence, eventually leading to its current
form: a comprehensive community college situated on a 100-plus acre campus with 16 buildings
and serving 25 cities and villages. Riverside, like many of the nation's community college, came of age.

As provided in the introductory vignette of this chapter, many of the buildings of Riverside are very similar. This is especially true for the academic buildings of the College. The majority is constructed out of brown brick, panels of steel (or perhaps aluminum?) painted white, and large panes of dark glass. From my perspective, each of the buildings looks somewhat like a layer cake. First there is a horizontal layer of brick, then a layer of white metal panels, and finally a layer of glass. The layers are repeated until reaching the top of the three-story building. The bottom of the buildings have a wider layer of brick than the upper levels – perhaps an engineering or architectural necessity – or someone simply wanted it this way. The buildings though not having much design diversity seemed clean; they seemed well kept. The grounds also seemed well maintained – the grass was green (in the fall months during my visits) and the concrete sidewalks were smooth. The parking lots...they were another story.

The mission and vision of Riverside Community College is similar to those found at other community colleges. Embedded in each are words of commitment to student success; words of having focus on providing outstanding instruction to students; and words of serving the community. From the website of Riverside, on one of the pages I found, is assertion that Riverside readies students to effectively compete in the global economy. I had the feeling I had seen this before – I had the feeling the Riverside’s mission was similar to many other community colleges. Additionally, Riverside is an Achieving the Dream (AtD) college; which is an initiative of the Lumina Foundation and other partner organizations. The goal of AtD is increased success for more community college students, especially students of color and low-income students ("Achieving the Dream", 2012). I found it interesting that I did not know Riverside was an AtD
college until several months into my exposure to the College. Perhaps I simply did not have opportunity to encounter people, programs or places where it would have been exposed.

The Students of Riverside

As I sat on a couch on the first floor of the Liberal Arts building, waiting for the time to make my way to the classroom where I was to conduct an observation of Nick's class, students were passing by – mostly in groups...sometimes in pairs, sometimes more than two. There were two students, one male and one female, walking fast, laughing and talking loudly. There was a class in session in a nearby room with the door open – I wondered if the noise of the students disturbed the class. As I maintained my perch, it seemed to me that the students that occupied the halls of Riverside were indeed a diverse community of people. From my (observational) perspective, no group was unrepresented. The diversity extended to the cloths students wore too. One student caught my eye, as he was clad in a bright lime green sweatshirt with black shorts and red shoes; another wore a brightly colored shirt – I think it was red. I failed to note the color. It occurred to me...I, in my khaki pants, dark gray turtleneck sweater and sport jacket, looked out of place. Thankfully, it was time for class. As I walked towards Nick's room, I wondered what the students thought about decor of the Riverside building – I think they would have selected something different.

The student body of Riverside Community College, like the community, is diverse. From the state community college system's published statistics, approximately 49% of the students are African American and Latino, while approximately 38% are White. As is the case with the students of many of the community colleges of the U.S., the underrepresented students of Riverside are more likely to enter requiring academic preparation (developmental education) than their White counterparts (Riverside Community College, Higher Learning Commission
Committee, 2010). Though, the need for developmental education for community college students is not isolated to underrepresented students. The state community college board found in 2005 that only 4.2 percent of all community college students in the state were above the 90th percentile in their high school class ranking. Moreover, a document on the Riverside website indicates more than 80 percent of all students entering the College need some form of developmental education. Indeed a primary purpose of the community college is to provide developmental education to all students (Baily & Morest, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

**The Participants**

This section provides an overview of the nine people who very generously provided their time and their knowledge to this study. The information about each was collected during the interviews, or after observation of class sessions. For each, I try and provide the reader with the ability to know something about them. Table 4.1 provides summary information about the participants of this study.

Table 1

*Summary Information of Each Case*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case #</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years*</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Years of experience as a full-time faculty member
Case one: Steve. For me, I am extremely laid back...I like to be personable, so, for myself, my first chore for myself is to learn their names on the first day. I have six courses this semester, so I have 120 students on the first day of class, I know all their names by the time they leave the classroom on the first day. I might forget them by the time they walk in the next class but I try really hard not to. Because I want to be able to say: hey Derek how did the weekend go? -Steve

Steve is a faculty member of the division of College Readiness at Riverside. While he is in an age range of 30 to 40 years, his youthful appearance belied his age (I asked each participant if they would be okay providing a range of age and all did so). Moreover, Steve was, with me, very outgoing. The first time I met him, his exuberance and energy engulfed me. Steve occupies a shared office at the College, as do all full-time faculty. The office space is a narrow, rectangular strip of a room with two steel desks – the kind that has the painted tops that is supposed to look something like wood, but never does. Steve's office seemed to reflect that of an orderly person. On the days that I visited, not much was out of place; books were set in shelves or neatly stacked. There were piles of paper on the desk, which I assume were student papers, however, I failed to ask, so, I am not sure. The office layout, the narrow rectangle, is such that there are two desks on one of the long walls, and shelves and cabinets on the wall behind the desks. It seemed very cramped to me. Steve occupied the area furthest from the door. It seemed to me that position sort of trapped the person in the room. The first time I was in his office I felt a bit claustrophobic. It got better with exposure.

Steve exclusively teaches developmental reading and writing. College leadership, several years prior, developed an approach to providing college preparation classes by creating a division dedicated to developmental education. A dean's position was created to head the area, and faculty were hired who would be dedicated to students who, according to the College, were
not prepared for college-level math, reading and writing. The Dean of College Readiness indicated, in a conversation after my observation of her meeting with faculty, that a primary reason the division was created was to apply focus to the challenge of students entering college unprepared for college coursework. Steve is one of those faculty who are dedicated to unprepared students.

Steve got his start professionally in education by taking a part-time job working in a writing lab at a four-year private college. The lab was intended to assist students who needed help with writing skills. That job evolved into one where he was directing a center responsible for tutoring students of the college. Steve said of his role leading the tutoring center: “In that role as well I was the development piece of the institution’s English department. So any student who came in with below college reading or writing skills was pretty much joined to me.” In addition to tutoring, Steve was an adjunct instructor at Riverside for several years; he said “...as many as ten years ago.” A full-time, tenure-track, position came available at the College two years ago; Steve applied and got the job.

I asked each of the participants what they like to do for pleasure. From this question, I learned Steve is the father of two young children, aged 4 years and 5.5 months (yes, Steve told me one was 5.5 months). Steve is an athlete who played college basketball at a small school (division 3). He continues to enjoy sports, playing and coaching tennis, playing racquetball, and basketball in recreational leagues. Steve's identity seems grounded in athletics – saying: “...male students tend to gravitate towards me a little bit because I am a big sports geek. I put myself through school on athletics, so I appreciate athletics like other teachers might not.” I too enjoy sports – perhaps a reason why I found Steve easy to interview.
Case two: Marcia. I knew that I wanted to find a personal interest in something that is on television - for example, Jamie Oliver's food revolution. So I watched it and I was thinking this is applicable to kids...he did something where he showed with chocolate milk all of the sugar that a child consumes in the course of a year. And it was like a semi truck. And I thought to myself...well first of all, this is gross...and second of all, nobody knows this stuff, because government, media, marketing, big companies don’t want us to know and don’t want us to talk about it. Hence the Twinkies. - Marcia, talking about how she develops ideas for class projects and assignments

Marcia was one of the more energetic participants of my study. She was one of the first to raise her hand to volunteer to participate, and she really seemed to enjoy the opportunity to talk to me. Marcia, who is in an age range of 30-40, seemed unafraid to talk about anything; she essentially said, on more than one occasion, ask me anything and I will answer. In terms of professional position at Riverside, she is a faculty member of the English department and teaches a variety of courses – ranging from developmental education to credit-earning English and Rhetoric classes. While Marcia is not officially a member of the College Readiness division, she teaches classes for the division, as do several faculty members of the English department. It seems that while Riverside established a division dedicated to developmental education, they did not (perhaps they were not able to) acquire full-time faculty sufficient to teach all of the classes (adjuncts are also liberally used). So, the faculty teaching credit courses in English and math also can teach developmental education. Also, at Riverside, English classes tend to focus on reading skills – the course description indicates: reading, discussion and interpretation of the literature. Rhetoric classes at the College tend to focus on writing – the description indicates an emphasis on analytical, critical writing skill development.
Marcia's office space is identical to Steve's. Her rectangular room is actually adjacent to Steve's, where she occupies the space closest to the door - she has a peer instructor who occupies the inner sanctum. Marcia's space was extremely orderly – not a paper clip out of place. Perhaps it seemed extremely orderly because there wasn't really much to be found in Marcia's work-space – a cabinet against the wall with shelving that held several rows of books. There was a personal computer on the desk, and not much else. When I arrived for our first interview, Marcia rather quickly led me away from her office to an open room at the end of the row of faculty offices in the English department area. For the second interview, perhaps she felt more comfortable with me, as I was invited in to her office and I was able to confirm the dearth of objects. Marcia, in many respects, seems to be a person that likes her world to be orderly, and she likes things to make sense. Marcia even uses pleasure time in order to stay abreast of current events. She obviously likes to watch television programs that inform; she also is an avid reader. She said she likes reading for pleasure and reading to learn. She also spends time making her home more orderly, as she said she likes to remodel it. When she told me this, I had an image of Marcia building cases for books and storage spaces for everything else. Marcia seems to be a person that likes to know at least a little something about most everything, and a lot about some things. She wanted to know more about the quantity of sugar in a year's worth of chocolate milk. She wanted to know what is in Twinkies, as will be found in chapter five.

Marcia's path to Riverside was through teaching developmental education at a large urban community college for several years. She then became an administrator of the college – responsible for developmental education programs. However, a confluence of circumstances led her to Riverside. Her job responsibilities at the urban college were reduced, and, as she said: “I hated being an administrator!” As she further explained: “[Then] this opportunity came along,
they were looking for someone with dev ed [developmental education] experience, I had it, and I was able to get the job and [then] tenure here. So, now I teach dev ed all the way to Rhetoric 102.” Marcia, at the time of our first interview, was starting her fourth year at Riverside. After a class that I was observing had ended, she fairly immediately took me out into the hallway and asked “how did I do?” I think she wanted a grade for the class. My response was essentially that she had done fine (I must admit that I did not know what else to say). It was an unforgettable moment of conducting this study.

Case three: Adrienne. I got actively involved in lots of things when I first started [at Riverside] and people were waiting for me to burn out. I am like, really? Because I can go as long as you can or even longer! It is kind of like that dynamic of…and I think part of that is because of a feeling that faculty can do a lot of things, but then administration does not let you carry them out, or doesn't let you see them to fruition. And I am like, no... Are you crazy? We are going to do this...

-Adrienne, responding to a question of how the environment fosters professional development

In the above vignette, where Adrienne asserts the environment of Riverside is not always conducive to faculty development, I learned that she is a person willing to push to get things done. A lack of enthusiasm for trying new things by constituents of Riverside is not a deterrent. From my interviews and observations of Adrienne, this was not the least bit surprising. From my perspective, she is a person who is confident of her capabilities, a person that is driven to get things done. Other faculty participants of my study professed thoughts of not always doing the right thing. They confessed that making mistakes was part of the learning process; it was part of the job. Not Adrienne. Throughout my time with her, she was always self-assured, direct, believing she was doing the right thing. As the vignette reveals, Adrienne believes College
administration can be a barrier to implementing new ideas – can inhibit different approaches to educating students. According to her, she and her faculty peers have ideas that need to be further explored. Indeed it seems to me that Adrienne subscribes to the belief that there are appropriate occasions to assume control.

Adrienne is a member of the English department at Riverside, focusing on developmental reading and writing under the auspices of the College Readiness division. She has been with the College for five years. She came to be at Riverside after her job at a publisher was eliminated, and then she decided to go back to school in order to find a different career path – not necessarily knowing what the career path with be, but knowing she wanted to find something different. She wanted to find something that would allow her to spend more time with family. The search led her to Riverside first as a student. She said: “And so after about two years [after no longer being employed with the publisher] I came to Riverside College [as a student] and got my associate’s degree, and then I went on and got my bachelor’s degree, and then my masters and then a PhD. I graduated from Riverside in, I think, 2001, and did all of that in a relatively short time.” Indeed, Adrienne's focus and determination enabled her to go from no degree whatsoever to a PhD in approximately a ten year period. It seems to me this is a remarkable accomplishment.

Adrienne said that during the course of obtaining credentials, she tutored, taught developmental education at a large urban community college, and taught graduate education at a private college. Her experience in developmental education at the urban college led to other opportunities that led to Riverside. She said about first teaching developmental education at an inner city community college: “Because [the inner-city/urban college] is an open enrollment college they have students that typically don't even test in at a level to take a developmental education class. They are that low. So, that is what I taught [the pre-developmental education
classes].” Adrienne, as she said, got started in higher education at a college where the majority of students require developmental education – they are deemed, by the system, not ready to take college-level classes. In the case of this inner-city college, they have large numbers of students who are deemed not ready to take developmental education. Perhaps it was out of these experiences that Adrienne developed a direct approach to instructing students and working with people. As she said about teaching students:

I always think that trying to create a safe environment, a comfortable environment, is good just because it garners their interests initially. But sometimes that doesn't work as they have to have a firm fist approach to say okay…I am not giving any leeway...just to make sure that they're not going to try and take advantage of me.

I appreciated the candor and openness, the direct approach, of Adrienne during our conversations – it seemed to me that she was willing to express her thoughts, no matter what they may be.

**Case four: Nick.** [When I first started] I was extremely confident that I had extensive knowledge, and that I was well equipped to do the job. And currently my confidence is there, but I am not as confident as I used to be…I think I realized that I don't know everything – but I am not afraid to say that out loud. Sometimes I get questions that I don't know the answer. And I will acknowledge – this is a great question and I honestly don't know the answer. Let's look it up - this will be a great learning experience for all of us. But I walked in thinking there is nothing else I can learn. Now I am thinking oh boy, there is just so much. -Nick, responding to a question about the ways in which his practice has evolved

Nick has been a faculty member of Riverside Community College for six years. Nick, like many of the participants of this study, believes that the responsibility for student learning is very
daunting; very challenging. According to Nick, the responsibility can become almost overwhelming for the faculty. For him, the learning process included learning that faculty cannot know everything, and that it is okay if things do not always go as planned (more on Nick's ideas of making mistakes is explored in chapter five). Nick seems to be an individual on a journey; a journey that started at Riverside as a student.

Nick is in the Allied Health division at Riverside. He primarily teaches introductory health science classes; classes that are gatekeeper to health career programs at Riverside. Nick's classes, from my observation of two of them, are large, and include students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Nick, like Adrienne, first walked onto the campus of Riverside as a student; in his case a student in the health sciences. He would leave with an associate's degree and continue his education elsewhere; however, there was something about Riverside that brought Nick back. As he said: “[I left] but there was something about Riverside that I wanted to come back. So, six years after graduating from college I started investigating and pursing a job that could lead me into a faculty role. And so it was six years ago that I became a full-time faculty member at Riverside.” Prior to returning to Riverside, Nick worked as a health services administrator and taught graduate courses. Moreover, he continues to work part-time in the health care field. He does so in order to bring a practitioner orientation to his teaching. He said that continuing to work in the field “enhances my credibility as an instructor. Plus I can relate more to the content of the courses that I teach, because it is not just the textbook, it is what I did a week ago.”

Nick seemed to me to be another highly enthusiastic member of the College. I had the opportunity to talk to his dean during the course of preparing the invitation to faculty to participate in my study (before I met Nick) and the dean said there was one person that she hoped would participate. She said he was really full of energy and ideas. Nick turned out to be
that person. When I asked him about his experiences in the environment of Riverside, his enthusiasm immediately surfaced. He face brightened and he said:

I have a fantastic dean. She is very supportive of ideas...And sometimes some of my ideas are kind of wacky, because I think in the big picture and she kind of brings me back to planet earth. I’ll say I want to do A, B, C, D and E. And she [the dean] is like, great, how about A and B for now? And then we can look at the other stuff later. I say, but I can do it all!

Indeed Nick seems to want to do it all. As I walked out of this office after our interview I felt exhausted, and initially I was not sure why. The other interviews (by the time I interviewed Nick I had spoken with 4 or 5 others) had not left me in this state. Later it occurred to me that perhaps it was because I had spent almost two hours trying to keep up with Nick – trying to match his energy. I think my attempt was in vain.

**Case five: Janice.** I think I am better able to manage the classroom today than when I started. I was young, I was in my mid-twenties, and now I am in my mid-thirties, so when I started it was almost like I was one of the students. A lot of times they [the students] thought I was one of them when I walked into the room... It was harder to manage when they thought of you as an equal. They still kind of do. I think the things I have learned, especially about the students and their backgrounds, and the struggles they deal with day in and day out, helps me to understand better [how to teach]. -Janice, responding to a question about how her instructional practice has evolved

Janice teaches developmental reading and writing at Riverside, as well as credit-level English and Rhetoric courses. Seven years ago Janice applied for a full-time, tenure-track, faculty position in the English department at Riverside Community College, and she said she
was elated to get the job. This was her first tenure-track position; a position she yet occupies today. However, prior to arriving at Riverside, she traveled abroad, teaching English as a Second Language in Europe. She said, while working on a master's degree: “[I] took a break in the middle [of getting the degree]...I decided I wanted to travel and wanted to try teaching. So, I got certified to teach ESL. I got that teaching certificate and I went to Europe and I taught for a while there.”

When she returned from abroad she came to Riverside and taught ESL, while also tutoring and teaching (part-time) at another college. Eventually, she obtained her current (tenured) position in the English department. She said that she decided she wanted to be a teacher while working on the master's degree, which is in English language and literature, saying: “I was really enjoying studying English and studying literature, and I decided I really wanted to teach.” She has been, as indicated above, with Riverside for approximately seven years.

Janice, as she provides in the vignette that opens this section, is in her mid-thirties. However, she really does appear to be much younger. The first time I saw Janice I was waiting to interview another participant and I thought she was a student waiting to see the person I was interviewing. During one of our interviews, Janice said she makes it a priority to maintain a healthy mind and body. A question about what she liked to do for pleasure revealed this health-conscious priority, as she said: “I like to spend time outdoors running, walking, biking and more. I [also] take a dance class.” Janice is also interested in cultural activities; saying “and I like to do anything related to the arts, including museum exhibits, lectures, theater.” As Janice also describes in the opening, she seems yet to be finding her way as an instructor. The transcripts of our interviews reveals, in some ways, a person that identifies with the students and their challenges, and
continues to experience her own challenges in learning to be a college instructor. She spoke of finding her way in the classroom when she said:

It is really a matter of trial and error, and lots of practice. When I came in, I did not have a lot of experience in teaching. I had some. But I think that is the best way to learn [is] you are thrown into it. You work with these classes every day – you keep revising your approach. You try this, you try that. Each semester you try something new. You teach a range of classes. You teach different groups of students. And you just do it over and over – and I think that is how you get good at it, just like anything else.

Janice, like several of the participants of this study, seemed to find that obtaining the position of college instructor is not a destination; it is a journey. A journey where the path is not always defined, the road surfaces are sometimes rough; surfaces like the roads the students travel that surround Riverside Community College.

**Case six: Kimberly.** *I think it is important to acknowledge [what the student brings to the classroom]. When they tell you they are taking care of the grandma, or that they have this many kids - and I have one right now that has seven kids, five are living with her and they are living in a shelter... So, you are definitely recognizing their struggles, [and] if you can put them in touch with any resources that can help them. Trying to make connections, help them find jobs or housing. I think the one thing I try and do is to push them...yes this is a really hard situation you have, so how are you going to find time to work on this math, and come see me for help, and take care of your kids? How are you going to plan that out? Talk to me about how you are going to plan that out.*

-Kimberly, responding to a question on how her knowledge of students is used in the classroom
Kimberly is a math instructor at Riverside. She teaches developmental as well as credit-level math. She is one of the instructors that have dual lines of responsibility at the College; as she teaches developmental education for the College Readiness department and credit math for the Math department. For example, she said she teaches math 055, which, according to her is “algebra and geometry part one” as part of the developmental education curriculum of the College. She said she is also teaching “math 110, which is College Algebra…I actually have two of those, one live [in-person] class and then an online class”. She said her schedule is often approximately fifty percent developmental classes and fifty percent college level. Kimberly is between 30 and 40 years of age. She is of African American descent, and she has taught at Riverside for four years. Much of her teaching experience is located in secondary education. It was in three systems that she was a high school math instructor and served for approximately ten years.

Kimberly came to Riverside directly from a public high school. Riverside is her first higher education teaching experience. She said: “In the middle of my second year at [the public high school] I applied for and got a job here at Riverside Community College. So, the last semester at [the high school] I was also teaching here – and then I have been here full time ever since.” The space where Kimberly works, which is in a different building than the English faculty that I had first interviewed, looked very much like the others. It was a smallish rectangular room setup for two people and containing steel desks painted black with the metal top that is supposed to look something like wood. The difference with Kimberly's office space was she had a table behind her desk, providing more flat space for the books and many stacks of paper that occupied her space. However, she seemed to know exactly where to find each and every paper. She demonstrated
this ability during the course of answering a question, when she pivoted around to the table and
deftly pulled a piece of paper out of one of the piles. I was impressed.

Kimberly, when I arrived at her office to do the first interview, looked at me like I was not
the person she was expecting. When I arrived and introduced myself, all previous
correspondence was via phone and email, she looked a bit taken aback. She said: “You are
Michael?” I said, “Yes, that would be me!” Perhaps it was my age or the way in which I was
dressed. I am not sure. Still, Kimberly seemed to quickly recover and was very generous with her
time, consenting to multiple interviews and multiple class observations. Kimberly seemed to
very much want to tell her story of life as a community college instructor. Her responses seemed
to me to be very candid, very honest about her experiences as well as her feelings of the students
and the college. The opening vignette was selected because of its representation of Kimberly's
knowledge and perceptions of the students. I think it reflects an instructor who is struggling with
the knowledge that her students have a lot going on, and with the perception that it is hard to do
something about.

Case seven: Patricia. I think I have grown tremendously in terms of using a lot more
creative ways of teaching because of the diversity. Because of the different student – the student
that does not have 24 hours a day to do what you want them to do. You have to teach them
around their schedules and their needs. When you are looking at a student population that
is...looking at where they are coming from in terms of age...you used to have students that were
all pretty close to the same age, late teens to mid-twenties. Now, they are very different ages,
come from very different backgrounds. They bring a lot more rich experiences too. Their
tolerance for blah blah blah teaching is becoming less and less. -Patricia, talking about
adapting to the community college environment and the students of the present day
Patricia is a full-time, tenured, faculty member of Riverside who teaches classes in the health sciences. Patricia began her career as a higher education instructor at a flagship state university. It was after teaching there for just a couple of years that she decided to focus on family and left teaching while raising her children. She reentered teaching at a small private college on a part-time basis. She was made a full-time faculty member after a few years, and ended up staying for 11 years in that capacity. Patricia then tried to retire, however, she said that “I found I wasn't really ready to stay home all the time. So, I came back into the system to teach.” The system into which she reentered was Riverside Community College. She applied for and got a full-time position at the College, and has been there for six years.

As the opening vignette for Patricia indicates, teaching at a community college, especially a community college with rich diversity, has been a unique experience. Patricia occupied much of her professional life at four-year institutions of higher education, and the community college experience has required her to adapt. She said that, early on, she had to learn that the community college student, even the full-time student, was not the same student as those at the four-year college. She said: “[at the four-year college] being a college student is often your life. They talk about their dreams. It is all encompassing. They are on campus together.” However, she went on, at the community college: “It is so diverse - they come in with such different experiences, and different ideas about why they are here.” Patricia seems to be telling us that, from her perspective, the community college student's identity is not necessarily that of student; that college is but a piece-part of their lives. She seems to be telling us that from her experiences the four-year student is, first and foremost, student. She went on to say “When you are here [at Riverside], a commuter college...they are not students primarily. That is missing. That is something else you need to cultivate in them.”
It is in the context of an educational environment that is rich in diversity that faculty, like Patricia, asserts the need to adapt. Three of the participants shared with me that often an approach different than what was used in the past is required. As Patricia essentially indicated, the instructor of today cannot just stand in front of the congregation and preach, and then go home. She said:

The students expect 24 by 7 availability – to the instructor and to information. They want faculty there 24 by 7 for their needs. It is: where is the bathroom? Send me an email. Are we meeting a 7 o’clock or 7:15?

Indeed this is a common expression of the participants of my study. They seem to feel caught in the vortex of a fast changing world, engaged with students who have a lot going on, and they are struggling to keep up.

**Case eight: Tom.** I had never expected to go into teaching, as I did literary studies and English studies in college. So, if you want me to be completely honest, when I took the job here it was because I needed a job – I figured I would try it out. I did not expect to love it the way that I love it. It was my finance, my wife now, that said – hey, you should apply for this job. And I thought, okay, I will give it a shot, and I ended up falling in love with it. It was very much a learn as I go process.

Tom, the person who did not imagine ending up a community college instructor, has been at Riverside Community College for thirteen years in various capacities. He began at the College as an adjunct faculty member, teaching English and other subjects. While serving in a part-time teaching capacity, he also tutored students. The role of tutor provided the opportunity to expand his role with the College, as it was in this capacity that he was given the opportunity to help launch a center for writing. It was in the position of tutor where he helped to develop a group of
tutors responsible for providing support to students in all phases of writing. It was in the part-time jobs of tutor and adjunct instructor that Tom found his calling to work with students; as he said in the vignette that opened this section, he found an occupation that he really enjoys.

Tom's first full-time position with Riverside was not as faculty, but as a director of the center responsible for tutoring students. However, he really wanted to teach, so, when a full-time, tenure track, faculty position opened up, he did not hesitate to pursue it. He said:

Throughout the time I was working in the [tutoring] center, I was teaching as an adjunct here in the English department, and when a position opened up I applied. I won the position. And, I have been here [in the English department] now for 6 or 7 years.

Tom teaches credit-level English and Rhetoric classes as well as developmental reading and writing. When Tom was telling me about his decision to pursue a full-time faculty position, I asked him if he ever regretted the decision to leave a management position (directing the tutoring center) for teaching and he immediately said no.

Tom, like many of the other participants of my study, talked about the insecurity of being an instructor, of being the person responsible for student outcomes. When I asked him about his early teaching experiences, he said:

I will admit, [the] first day, [the] first class, 8am on Monday morning, I was petrified. But I used the time between semesters to reflect, to look back and evaluate and think about what worked and what did not work. Ask myself – do I need to scrap that and try something new? Can I revise that; tweak it so that it reaches a wider audience?

Tom is a person that is constantly surrounded by younger people. At the College it is his students. At home, he has four children that keep him occupied. When I asked him what he did in his spare time, he said: “I have four kids. Therefore, I don't have spare time.” Though he did
add, “When I am not grading, I like to spend time with friends, read, watch sports, and hunt for toys.” I sensed that Tom is an individual who is happy with his current state in life. He was very easy to talk to, very giving of his time. I think his colleagues have similar sentiment, as he was someone other participants recommended that I invite (as I was invoking snowball sampling) to join my study. As with all of the participants, I learned a lot from Tom.

**Case nine: Emma.** The programs I worked at were year-round, so, they included what you would typically think of as summer camp, but also outdoor education. All of the teaching and programming is necessarily hands-on. You would do an activity, and then often times you would reflect on that activity in some way. But every week it is 200 new people. And I would immediately need to know, if I wanted to be effective, 200 names. So, I learned very quickly how to engage and connect with a large number of people, but personally – and I do that in the classroom and I think it makes a huge difference...in them [the students] feeling that as a teacher I am aware of them and care.  -Emma, talking about the ways in which she learned how to be a community college instructor

Emma is a tenured instructor in the social sciences division of Riverside Community College. She has taught students in history and the humanities at the College for four years. Many of her classes are introductory in nature, and a diverse population of students attends them. When I asked her to talk about her students, she said: “Extremely diverse...we have multitudes of ethnic backgrounds.” For Emma, student diversity offers opportunities, opportunities to bring different perspectives to the classroom. It was when I asked her to talk about students and their experiences, and bringing those experiences to the classroom, she talked about a pop culture class (a humanities offering). She said:
The students do a lot of analyzing of the underlying messages of pop music, or themes in movies. And that class, with the diversity of the students in the discussions, is sort of a core feature [bringing student’s perspectives to the academic environment] of what is happening.

Emma came to Riverside, as she described, by taking a rather unusual path. The unusual path to community college faculty seems to be usual for the participants. For Emma, after getting her bachelor’s degree, she served in the Peace Corps, worked as a community organizer, and, for several years, was employed as a camp director. It is the role of camp director to which Emma is referring in the opening vignette. This is where she learned how to learn a lot of student's names in a short period of time – and she found that it was important to do so. During her time as camp director, she decided to enter the teaching profession. She served as an adjunct faculty member of several colleges. She brought this aspect of her background to light when asked about how she developed her approach to instructing college students, and she said: “I taught as an adjunct…so I taught at a lot of different schools. Universities. Smaller liberal arts colleges. A Christian college. Very different community colleges.” She further explained how these experiences helped shape her approach to teaching; saying: “From those experiences I developed a way of engaging in education that was more hands-on and less traditional – to sort of come with that perspective into the practice of teaching at the college level.”

Emma was another participant that came to me via snowball sampling, as several of the participants, as well as a dean and a director, strongly recommend that I try and include her in the study. Indeed she seems to be a popular instructor on the Riverside campus. As with all of the participants, I enjoyed interviewing Emma, she seemed very direct, and seemed very open. When I asked her what she liked to do in her spare time she talked about being outdoors,
cooking, and other activities. Then she said: “My deck parties are epic.” Somehow I don’t doubt that they are.
Chapter 5

Presentation of Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected for this study. The purpose of the study is to explore faculty perceptions and ideas of the essential knowledge needed to be a community college instructor and the ways in which their knowledge includes the student. I conducted the exploration through the voices of nine participants of a Midwestern United States community college. Riverside Community College was selected as the campus provides a diverse student community. The selection of this college allowed me to situate the study in the context of an institution that has historically struggled to retain an important group of students – underrepresented students. The context allows me to bring forward the stories of those often instructing underrepresented students in institutions of higher education that can be challenged to retain these students, and reveal the ways in which their essential knowledge may influence the experiences for these students.

The data collected for the study principally comes from face-to-face interviews with each of the nine participants. Each was interviewed at least once; follow-up interviews were conducted with five of the participants; a third interview was conducted with two. Each of the initial interviews was recorded (each participant agreed to be recorded) using a digital audio recording device in their offices. The follow-up interviews were not recorded as they were conducted in classrooms and at campus locations not conducive to recording. I wanted to meet with the participants in different settings, so the follow-up interviews were conducted in empty classrooms, and other semi-private places. Additionally, four of the participants consented to allow me to conduct a classroom observation. For each of these four participants, I observed at least one class session; for three of them, I attended a second-class meeting. A third form of data
gathering was employed, document review, and each of the participants provided me with a version of a syllabus used for a course they currently instruct. However, only one of the participants was able to provide me with a syllabus from the past - I requested a syllabus from two or more years past in order to analyze for changes in instructional approach. A summary of the data collected from each participant is presented in Table 5.1. In addition to data collection from the participants, a fourth form of information came from attending three faculty professional development sessions conducted by Riverside's Faculty Professional Development Center, in order to get insight on a potential source of essential knowledge. Lastly, I attended a dean's meeting with faculty, to observe a potential source of knowledge development.

Table 2

Data Collection Summary

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
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<th>Observation(s)</th>
<th>Current Syllabus Provided</th>
<th>Past Syllabus Provided</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Tom</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As described in chapter three, the collected data was analyzed for recurring words, patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Patton, 2002). For the cross-case analysis, I used a qualitative analysis software program, NVivo (version 9), which allowed me to consolidate all forms of data (e.g. interview audio as well as transcribed interview text, observation data, and each collected document) into a single location. The software program was used to organize and access the data - for example, every piece of information from a particular participant could be quickly extracted, ordered, and searched. NVivo was also used to code the data. For example, for each interview, I used NVivo to first highlight recurring words and patterns, and then to move the data into theme-based files (nodes) for further analysis. The additional analysis entailed cross-comparing the data for commonalities, conflicts and connections to the conceptual framework. During the iterations of analysis, themes emerged through patterns. The themes and associated patterns were often revised and reformulated, and, in some cases, were set aside. It was a highly fluid, highly inductive process.

The themes and associated patterns that endured are organized by research question and presented in this chapter as the significant findings of the study. For the first research question, the ideas and perceptions of essential knowledge, the themes are closely connected to the student. This was an unexpected result. It was not anticipated the essential knowledge themes would be so much about the student. It was expected they would include aspects of pedagogy, curriculum, and policy - in addition to the student. While elements of pedagogy and policy are found in the patterns that follow, they are mostly secondary to students – they mostly surfaced while talking about students. Theme one goes to the idea that faculty need to know their students - who they are and how to connect with them. Theme two is faculty knowing about the ideal student – it is about knowing that some students will succeed; having an idea of who these
students are and the ways in which they will present themselves. Theme three, however, is about, perhaps, the perceived reality of the situation for faculty – knowing that some students won’t succeed. For the second research question, the sources of funds of knowledge, two themes emerged: formal sources; and, informal sources. For each of the themes that follow, I attempt to coherently bring forward the voices of the participant. My intent is to allow the participants to speak for themselves, and to use their words to capture shared ways of thinking and knowing. The themes and patterns are summarized at the end of the chapter. They are also presented in Appendix D, which provides a visual representation of the social system of Riverside on which knowledge is mediated.

**Theme One: Essential Knowledge of Faculty: Know the Students**

*I think you have to be very aware whether or not you are engaging the students. I think it is very important to get a sense of, in the classroom, where the students are, and what they need in order to be able to understand what is happening.* –Emma (study participant)

A primary purpose of this study is to explore faculty perceptions the essential knowledge needed to instruct students. This theme exposes a shared way of thinking about essential knowledge amongst the participants. This theme, know the students, is many of the participants asserting that a principal function of the community college faculty is teaching students, and in order to teach the students the instructor has to know the students. Community College faculty, according to the participants, need to know about the experiences, challenges and ideas their students bring to the classroom. Moreover, it is through the lens of the funds of knowledge framework that the construction of this theme and associated patterns is solidified. The framework indicates that in order to perform some activity, like constructing houses, or farming, knowledge is needed of the environment and the activity itself (for example, see Velez-Ibanez &
Greenberg, 1992). For example, to be an effective farmer, one needs to know about the tools necessary to grow crops, and the food that people of the region want to consume. From the perspective of the classroom environment, studies using the funds of knowledge framework have consistently found that teachers “first and foremost [must] know the learner” (Hogg, 2011, p. 674). The teacher must know that students come to the educational setting, including the higher education setting, with different expectations, experiences, ideas, and priorities. The teacher must know that students come to college with different ways of thinking and knowing.

The participants of this study provide evidence that faculty understand the significance of knowing the student. There is evidence of believing that it is from contextualized knowledge that an effective learning environment is established. Specifically, this theme exposes perceptions of many of the participants that essential knowledge includes the ability to communicate on different levels with students; knowing that a relevant pedagogy is important, and knowing that student’s lives are often fraught with complexities that, according to the participants, can render education-related activities somewhat inconsequential. These perceptions are presented in the patterns that follow. The first pattern brings to the surface the idea that faculty need to be able to connect with their students.

**Pattern one: "Talk to me": Connecting with students.** Emerging out of the data is the idea that community college faculty ideas and perceptions of essential knowledge include the ability to reach out to and engage with students. Eight of the ten participants referenced communicating and connecting with the students as an important capability of faculty. Janice said: "I think you really have to get to know your students...you have to get to know who they are and the ways that they learn. Because, it is a really diverse population here, and students with so many different backgrounds.” The participants largely believe faculty need to connect with
students in order to provide encouragement, guidance, and relevant instruction. Nick, for example, asserted that student's social world can have significant influence on their academic experience and therefore it is helpful to talk with them, to learn about the experiences they bring to the classroom. When I asked Nick if he could describe a conversation of this nature, he responded:

I tell my students, it is okay. If you need help, tell me. Talk to me. Engage in a conversation with me after class...My job is to help them [Nick pauses] learn; and [perhaps] to help them do so in the face of challenges. Perhaps [helping them] by engaging in a conversation with students about what is going on in their lives. Some students do share, they start opening up...it is more about the struggles they are having right now in life. It sparks a conversation, and sometimes it allows [other students] who are not as vocal to kind of briefly engage in a conversation. It is more that you [the student] put yourself in a social situation, and people are talking, they are venting about how difficult going back to school is. And I agree one hundred percent with them...And so the first couple of days of the semester, I engage in a conversation with students, [I ask] have you talked to your family? How are they feeling about this? Have you shared? Have you opened your books? Have you shared your syllabus? It is not about them [the family] understanding the content; it is about them understanding the amount of work you are committing to; and scheduling time for yourself.

Nick is seemingly demonstrating desire to develop genuine interactions with students, which, according to the literature can have a positive impact on college students (Hagedorn, Perrakis & Maxwell, 2006). However, and perhaps importantly, Nick admits that while he reaches out, students do not always respond. This is an issue that surfaces from other
participants. Moreover, from my observation of two of Nick's classes, while there were students that did stay after class to talk with him, they all seemed to be the same student. The interactions seemed to be with a limited group of students. From my observation, there was not much diversity in the students that communicated with Nick; mostly the students were white. This was true in other observations as well; the students that mostly interacted with the instructor seemed to be the same kind of student. It must absolutely be noted that I was only present for a very few classes and therefore my observation of the interaction between instructors and students was highly limited.

Many of the participant's reference to connecting with students came on an academic level. They spoke of the need for students to talk with them about their struggles with aspects of the course. Kimberly, talking about helping students with math assignments, said: "...you have to sit and talk with them...and ask, how did you do that? Why did you do that? It is really just spending a lot of time dialoging with students, and to be able to do that effectively, that need to be comfortable with you first." Steve echoed Kimberly in that faculty need to engage with students, as he described, on their classroom struggles. Steve said: "There is really no one panacea for all students, but I like to work as much as possible one-on-one with [them]." Steve further explained that his previous experience in tutoring students, working with them at an academic level, equipped him to work individually with students. Janice, while indicating the desire to work individually with students, points out, as did Nick, that many will not come to see her, as she said: "So, some of them do take advantage, they come and see me. However, it does not usually happen unless they do poorly on an exam or test. Then, sometimes, they will come and see me." Tom said he too likes to connect with students on classroom challenges; however, he too said it is not always easy. Tom said:
I am constantly begging them to come see me in my office; grabbing them before or after class to talk to them about certain things. With my developmental classes, I have been requiring they spend an hour a week in the tutoring center, so, even if they don't come and seek help from me one-on-one, hopefully they are listening and doing that one-on-one with someone else.

Tom acknowledges above the connection can fail, and so he has established an alternate resource for students. Janice, when I followed up with her on the need to connect, talked about speaking with students in order to determine if additional support is needed. She talked about letting them know about the services the College has to offer. Janice said:

If it is a student with a documented learning disability, then they should register there [with the college’s center for students with disabilities] If we are not sure whether they have one or not [a learning disability] we can approach the student and mention the resource is available to them. If you are teaching [developmental education] classes you often have students that have disabilities. So, that is a resource. If it comes to test-taking, they have reading software that blows up the type so they can read easier…and if I see someone struggling [I can reinforce that resources are available] and I can also offer that I have office hours for you [the student] to come see me.

I asked Janice if many students took advantage of the services and her office hours. She (Janice) responded that "a small number [of students] do. Honestly, not enough do. It is understandable; a lot of them are just overwhelmed." Janice brings forward a point that is embedded in the narratives of others: that they are reaching out, and there are services available, however sometimes students don’t respond. According to one area of success scholarship, underrepresented student responses of this nature, often manifesting as non-responses, can be
associated with the student feeling intimiated by the environment, or not being helped with navigating the often complex processes of the institution (Garcia, 2010; Perrakis, 2008). As per Nieto (2007), it is not unusual for social and cultural disconnect to occur between underrepresented students and the institution. Perhaps the services of the institution are not aligned with student needs. Essentially, issues can surface out of practices developed by college faculty and staff that are enigmatic to some students.

Moreover, it is in the dialog that we begin to see challenges and conflicts - the difference between an espoused approach perhaps arising out of social norms of the community college environment and the reality of the instructor’s world. There becomes a gap between the ideal, like engaging with students, and the reality that the connection fails with students. Also, not found in the narration of the participants is indication of ability to truly understand why the connection can fail. This condition is congruent with findings from funds of knowledge literature, which indicate that relationships between teachers and students are often thin - not well connected (for example, see Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). The reality of failed connections and thin relationships was found in the classroom, during observations of my participants. An example is provided next.

I attended an evening session of Kimberly’s remedial math class. There were 13 students in attendance that evening – most of which were African American and Latino. Kimberly began the class by distributing an in-class assignment, and asking the students to find a partner. Some did. Some didn’t. A younger male student sitting next to me simply put the sheet down on the table in front of him, inserted a pair of earphones connected to a music player (like an iPod), leaned back and closed his eyes. A student in the front of the room put the piece of paper aside and began to turn the pages of a magazine. Kimberly circled the classroom once or twice and then left. I
looked at my watch as she left (I am not sure why), and then again when she returned. She had been gone approximately ten minutes.

*Just do it.* When Kimberly returned, a student asks her a question. She replies: “Just write something…that one is not solving a problem, it is about writing something.” I looked at the piece of paper (Kimberly had given me a copy), and question three asked the student to write a brief narrative on a particular math function. The student did not understand that he was to write something. The student picked up his writing instrument (I could not tell if it was a pencil or a pen), and stared at the paper for what seemed to be a long time (it was in reality probably but a few minutes). He slowly lowered his arm to the table and replaced the instrument. He wrote nothing on the piece if paper. The class session progressed; and at some juncture it occurred to me no one wanted to be there. Kimberly did not want to be there. Many of the students did not want to be there. It seemed to me that we were all waiting for the class to end – it seemed apparent that some of us were hoping the end would hurry. As I left the classroom, I wondered what had just happened. Actually, this curiosity occurred as several of my observations concluded. I wondered if these were the same participants that espoused essential knowledge includes connecting with students. The next patterns continue with the theme of knowing students; however, they too reveal challenges associated with doing so.

**Pattern two: “Keep it real.”** The participants of this study assert instructional capability is enhanced by a pedagogy that enables students the flexibility to inject their interests and experiences. Specifically, there is broad espousal, especially by faculty participants with five or less years of experience, of student centered instruction; or instruction where course materials, course concepts, and forms of communicating with students are developed and presented in ways that allows the student to inject that which is familiar --whatever the familiar may be to a
particular student-- into the educational setting. The participants are asserting an essential area of knowledge becomes knowing the student and using this knowledge in instructional development in order to promote, for example, engagement in active learning (Rust, 2002).

For Marcia, a faculty member with four years of experience, it is about keeping it relevant, or keeping it real, for students. She said: "You [faculty] are always having to convince them [students] why it is relevant [Marcia pauses], even if it is something they are going through for a career, they want to get there as quickly as possible. They need to see how to keep it real, otherwise you don't have them." Other participants also refer to this conceptually as a relevant approach to learning. Janice said: "For me it has to be practical. Everything you teach, you have to show it and they [the students] have to practice it...a lot. That is especially true, I feel, in the [developmental education] classes." Janice went on to essentially say the approach to a productive learning environment is developing examples that connect to something interesting for the student and therefore helps them to better understand the concept she is teaching. Burbach, Matkin & Fritz (2004) argue that meaningful, useful, learning occurs when students can bring their experiences into the classroom and integrate them into, for example, a mathematics assignment. It is developing essential, practice-related, knowledge that is the emphasis of the funds of knowledge framework. So, while the emphasis of this study is on practical, or practice-related, knowledge development by faculty, the participants point out that, as much as possible, it is important to allow students to bring whatever is practical for them to the classroom.

Another emphasis of the funds of knowledge framework is the indigenous nature of knowledge development. For this study, it is suggested by the participants, in order to keep it real, that, ideally, course content is connected to the local context of the students – which
indicates faculty know about the local contexts of their students. Perhaps the content relates to current events. Marcia is one of the participants who indicate instructors need to know that meaningful student engagement requires faculty really knowing the student, and allowing the student to bring their ways of knowing into the classroom. Sometimes, it is a matter (she states) of keeping abreast of topics on the Internet. Marcia said:

So, if it is a topic like how to write an argument, you relate it to how a war was started [Marcia pauses], something very recent in the media because this is a very quick media generation with YouTube; and they are not always actual facts or truthful, but if you look at things that are very recent, very popular, sometimes in terms of music, musicians, advertising, all those types of things, and then you ask the question why, and then relate it to different areas [of the class].

Marcia went on to describe that she often keeps it real by using something to which we can all relate - food. She said:

We always have to do a narration. It is a requirement for all of the Rhetoric 101 teachers. And I thought, okay that is fine, so, what you do? How did I spend my summer vacation? Gross! So, I got into this subject of: what does everybody love? And, what does everybody have in common? That is eating! There are all different aspects of that – so, the topic of that is they have to pick an event in their lives that impacted them, whether positively or negatively, that had food involved. And, the food angle gives them two main paragraphs within the essay they have to use the five senses. They have to tell me how it tasted, how touched in their mouths, what is smelled like. But then around that they have [there are] different aspects; I have had funerals, I have had…my favorite story I teach in class is former ESL student named Roberto [a pseudonym] who didn't know
better and at a picnic with his co-workers was chasing a squirrel when they were still hungry, and how he had to deal with the culture shock of...what do you mean you don’t eat squirrel? In my [Roberto’s] little town in Africa we did...so, and then I make jokes about a McSquirrel at McDonalds and before you judge...you might eat one too.

Marcia perhaps learned something about one way of life for people in Africa. Perhaps she can use this knowledge in future activities. Steve, also a less experienced faculty member, also learned about his one of students via an assignment designed to allow students to bring aspects of their world into the classroom. Steve said:

Last year I had a guy write about how to make the perfect sandwich; or I had a guy write about how to shoot the perfect jump shot. I said not to pigeonhole the ladies, but last year I had a lot of ladies write about how to do their hair. And then I had one girl [ask] if she could talk about how [she talks to and lives] amongst [drug addicts]. And I said, absolutely, you can write about that, if that is what you want to write about. And she said, yeah, there is a whole thing...and she started going on and on about you can’t do this and you have to recognize that. And I said, great. Why don’t you put those into sections, and put those into steps and start writing it. And so, they [certain students] will come up with the zaniest things. And other people in class will chuckle a little bit, and then kind of not chuckle, and then go wait a minute, she is serious? And I say, yes she is serious; and I am good with her writing about it. And so I tell them on the first couple of days that writing is a pretty intimate process, and they are going to be telling me things about themselves that they might not tell other people.

The situation described by Steve brings insight of faculty perception of the local context; that students come to Riverside with a variety of experiences and with different ways of thinking.
about the world. It surfaces ideas of faculty bringing the student’s world into the academic setting. However, narrative also surfaces certain superficiality in the knowledge of students – as Steve’s connects the student who lives amongst drug addicts to being zany. There is lacking evidence of using the knowledge of students in ways to significantly advance learning experiences for the students. This becomes a recurring theme that is further explored in the sections that follow.

Patricia also concurred with the idea of connecting academic activities to the world of students. She said: "It is through the experiences of the academic setting and the real world that connections can be made that create powerful learning experiences for the student." Emma contributed to this pattern as she spoke about an introductory course that she teaches. She said:

In my Humanities class, that is sort of an introduction to the arts, so what they have been exposed to, and in the process of being exposed to new things that is something that we talk a lot about in the course. For example, in terms of trying to appreciate modern art – [I ask the students about their] experiences. And then we encounter it. And how they feel about it. And then later reflecting. [I ask them] so, after [going through this experience] what has changed for you? Students really do often, especially those that have not really been exposed to art and feel uncomfortable trying to interpret - they often reflect that it was a very changing experience. It is a fun class to teach. It is one of the unanticipated delights of teaching here…

There are occasions where it is not always easy for faculty to be real with students. Steve, when I asked him if this approach was successful, indicated for his developmental education students:
Some of them [students] will find it almost remedial. [They] will say, [he sighs], why don't you give me a topic that is more like what I will work on in college? And I’ll say: well, where are you? So, I thought this was college! If you want me to give you a topic, I’ll give you a topic. I can give you something more, quote on quote, more advanced. I said, I don't want to muddle...I said [to the student] all I am doing is teaching rhetorical moves – what I am doing is teaching you how to do this correctly.

Moreover, I observed the challenges for faculty to keep it real in Adrienne’s classroom. She had asked her students, many of whom are Latinos and African Americans, to watch three videos posted on You Tube (an internet website where anyone can post videos). Adrienne stated that these videos were selected because “they are popular on You Tube.” Adrienne seemed to be attempting to introduce material into the classroom that would capture the student’s interest. One of the videos was the commencement address delivered by Steve Jobs at a Stanford University commencement address – when he was then CEO of Apple. Adrienne asked her students “what about the Steve Jobs video?” A young African American male student sitting in the middle of the classroom offered: “It was the longest 15 minutes of my life.” The room fell silent until Adrienne, obviously frustrated, said to the student “you need to self-motivate.” The room fell silent again, until a young woman offered that she “liked the structure of the videos.” Adrienne seemed to sense this exercise was not going as planned. She did not respond to the student; did not ask why and what the student liked about the structure; instead she became distracted, saying: “Don’t make me be a mom. Turn the computer off!” I looked to my left and a student was quickly pressing a button on the screen of the computer that sat in front of him. It seemed to me the issue with bringing Steve Jobs into the classroom was these young, diverse students either don’t know Jobs or don’t care about Jobs. Steve Jobs may be a fixture in the U.S. popular
culture, but he is not someone with whom these students were able to relate. He is not a significant figure in their world. It seemed that Adrienne was attempting to use what Gay (2002) would call “pedagogical bridge” (p. 113), where teachers use something relevant to the students to aid in learning important course concepts. While bringing aspects of the lived world of the student into the classroom can be a powerful learning tool, in order to do so there must be relevant knowledge of the student and the aspects that are meaningful to him or her. There seemed to exist disconnect in this attempt to bring relevant learning into the classroom experience.

Lastly, I note that in terms of years of experience, which is the unit of analysis for this study, this is one of the few patterns where there are differences in faculty ways of thinking about essential knowledge that is based on experience. It is faculty with less experience that indicates the need to keep it real. Another potential factor is age. In general, the faculty with less experience are in a younger age range than those with more experience. Perhaps there is connection of age to this pattern as younger faculty are closer in age to their students.

**Pattern three: “They have a lot going on.”** Community college faculty ideas of essential knowledge should include, according to the participants of my study, knowing their students are highly occupied outside of the classroom. According to the participants, faculty should know the students of the community college are often facing a myriad of personal situations as they are trying to complete assignments, take tests and do the things required of a college student. The participants of this study assert faculty need to know their students may have families, they likely work, may be divorced, live in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and more. The problem of a lot going on can be exacerbated with developmental education students, as when asked about what faculty need to know, Janice said:
They are working, they have full time jobs, they have families they are responsible for; and then they are trying to have a better career, and so they take on too many classes very often. And if they are already academically underprepared, then it is just a domino effect. I also try to tell them at the very beginning: the course is demanding; you need to expect to spend this many hours a week. And I tell them, if you have got too many courses, this failure is what is going to happen … I see it over and over again.

Tom, when asked about what faculty need to know about being a community college instructor, quickly went to talking about the students. He too spoke about needing to know that many of them they have significant activities outside of college, and that many do not seem to know what they are getting themselves into (with college). When speaking about the students in his developmental education classes, Tom said:

I always interview them on the first day, and I am always kind of cringing when they say – well, I am working two jobs, and I am taking four classes…and I am thinking, when are you going to do everything I am going to ask you to do for the next 16 weeks? A lot of our students have a lot going on in their lives – they are taking care of family, working one or sometimes two jobs, they are trying to do too much with their schedules. They want to get done…so they are taking 6 classes…so something has to give.

Kimberly, when asked about essential knowledge and how it connected with the students of her developmental math classes, said community college instructors of developmental classes need to know they will have students whose personal and academic lives will clash. Kimberly said:

The most common typical student I have has a very full plate – taking anywhere between 5 and 15 credit hours, working anywhere between 40 and 60 hours a week, having
anywhere between 1 and 3 kids. Maybe taking care of a mother who is elderly. Maybe taking care of a sibling. Maybe working two jobs. [For my students] typically the amount of time they spend on the class is the time you are in your class plus…the two hours before it [the class] starts. And so, I tell them on the first day, if the only time you have to spend on this class is when you’re in the [classroom] seat, then you are really going to struggle. You know, the college standard is two hours outside [of class] for every hour inside [of class]. If they are doing an hour [outside] for every hour inside, it is a miracle. Mostly they are not.

Kimberly, Tom and Janice believe their students have a lot going on, and they believe it is negatively influencing their ability to succeed in college. From my experience, it is not unusual that community college administrators, faculty and staff know their students have a lot going on. We know, or perhaps I should say that our way of thinking, that the community college student is often challenged to have sufficient time and resources to effectively participate in educational activities. This way of thinking arises out of the narratives of the participants – where they bring forth perception that the personal situations of college students can create overload. Essentially, the participants of this study tend to locate responsibility on the student - it is the student that has a lot going on, and therefore may not participate to the extent necessary to succeed. It is indeed interesting that the ideas of the students are generalized – and that while there is espoused view that effective teachers really know their students, these teachers don’t really know their students.

Moreover, perhaps the overload issue needs attention by those that can help fix the problem. Specifically, Garcia (2010) asserts that student time burden may be more than a student issue; it may be an institutional failure to provide counseling and other support services before they sign up for classes. It may be erroneous to locate responsibility solely on the student. Moreover, in
of institutional affect, there is indication that changes of the college and its people are creating challenges for the students who have a lot going on. The changes are also creating challenges for the instructors. When asked about the challenges faculty of Riverside College encounter on a regular basis, Steve said:

...in some of the reading courses the [department] requirement for a reading course is that students have this MyMathLab program, which is a really nice program when you have a computer. What happens when you live at home without a computer because you cannot afford one? Well then you have to do all of your work on campus at all times, so you have to be here to do your work. And we are talking about students who are working one, two or sometimes three jobs supporting kids often. And so, there is a strange dynamic of how much should we be requiring in terms of extra things, not that books should be considered extra, but how much should we be requiring? How much can we be flexible? How much can we absolutely not be? We cannot say no you don’t have to have a book!

Steve seems to have perception that students come to college not only with different ways of thinking, but they come with a variety of capabilities. Steve’s essential knowledge includes knowing that the requirements of the College, like having access to a software program, can invoke challenge upon students who do not have the financial resources to acquire a computer. The issue becomes especially acute for those that have a lot going on. Steve seems to be struggling with the requirements of the department and knowing the reality of his students. Steve doesn’t seem to know what to do about it. This is a common reality amongst the participants; they know their students are struggling, and they don’t know what to do about it.

Kimberly also speaks to the effects of institutional change in a context of those who are struggling and not knowing what to do about it. She talks about not only knowing that her
students have a lot going on, but also knowing that changes in scheduling, like creating compressed-schedule classes that are designed to be convenient for students, exacerbates the challenges. Kimberly said:

Even as I think about this material I think it is hard for the students to absorb that amount of material...that many different concepts at once, and have a meaningful understanding when you are taking a class one night a week for three hours. I am like really? Are you really going to absorb it and get it? Like in college when you took an education class...the instructor could say we are going to talk about this and pull it apart for three hours – just one theme. Where if you are taking a five [semester] hour math class, and you are taking it two days a week, you are doing two and half hours each meeting which means, if you are doing one lesson every 50 minutes, that means you are doing two and half lessons every time you meet. That is a lot for someone’s brain. But students tend to think - well I am really busy so I am going to take the two-night [class] or I am going to take the one night Statistics class.

Again, an implication of this pattern is the institution and its approach seems to exacerbate what is already a challenging environment for some students. Janice, Tom and Patricia also expressed frustration in knowing of the struggle but seemingly not knowing what to do. There are some faculty who have tried to do something. They have tried changing their approach. Adrienne, for example, indicated that she has tried reducing the amount of work for the students outside of class. Nick said that he creates short videos for key course concepts and posts them on Blackboard for students; so those that are really busy can at least watch the videos. Nick also counsels his students on time management and advises them that getting a C in the class is a good thing - telling them "you are passing...you have so much going on in your life, it is pretty
amazing!” Nick’s reality seems to be that a student that somehow passes the course has done well. Nick’s reality is that these students who are really busy and really struggling are succeeding by moving on.

A thread that weaves it way through these patterns is that the participants have ideas about the ideal instructor. It has been brought forth, in the scholarship, that faculty perspectives could include the ideal of student (e.g. Bensimon, 2007). The student likely to succeed is likely to exhibit certain characteristics and behaviors. This study reveals, through the voices of the participants, espoused ideas of instructor. Embedded in the narratives of the participants is evidence, perhaps grounded in environmental norms, that faculty have ideas of the ideal instructor. The instructor who connects, who keeps it real, who knows their students have a lot going on. Also embedded, as previously stated, is conflict – knowing their students have a lot going on, but, again, perhaps not knowing what to do about it; perhaps not getting institutional support to do something about it. The next theme indeed supports Bensimon’s (2007) assertion that faculty may have ideas of the student who will succeed.

**Theme Two: Essential Knowledge Includes Knowing Who Will Succeed**

_The successful student is the one that works hard. They have to work hard. They have to be willing to work hard. I do think the courses are challenging. Especially given all of the other responsibilities we know they have._ -Janice

The funds of knowledge framework calls attention to the ways in which common ideas of thinking and believing tends to develop. It is from the rich base of studies that have used the framework as a conceptual foundation, there is evidence that members of cultural community tend to develop shared ways of thinking. Moreover, the social structure that binds the cultural community mediates the development and acceptance of commonly accepted norms (for
example, see Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 2005). Regarding essential knowledge, the norms may pertain to ideas about how something works or how a job should be done. The norms may also relate to ideas about those involved in conducting some essential activity (Zanoni et al., 2011).

In the educational environment, the literature reveals that practice-related norms are developed in the context of the social structure – norms such as the dominant paradigm. The dominant paradigm indicates that practitioners of higher education, including faculty, have commonly held ideas about the characteristics and behaviors of those students who tend to succeed (Bensimon, 2007). This is the norm of the good student. The participants of my study provide evidence of the dominant paradigm. Specifically, out of the narratives of the participants emerge ideas of the ideal student. The majority of the participants indicate they are able to identify the type of student who tends to do well in their classroom. Their essential knowledge includes knowing there are those that will succeed, and knowing who they are. Two patterns supporting this theme emerged out of dialog; each of them focuses on expected behaviors of the successful student.

**Pattern one: "They know how to act."** The focus of this pattern is that faculty, according to the participants of my study, are able to identify, sometimes very quickly, those students who are going to succeed. They can identify the student most likely to successfully complete their class. They are the ones that know how to present themselves; know how to engage with faculty in ways that demonstrate they are going to succeed. As Kimberly was talking about her students and the ways in which her practices had developed, I asked her, in terms of faculty approach, if students were treated differently at Riverside and why. Her response reveals she has an idea of who will succeed. To my question of: how are students treated differently here at Riverside? Kimberly responded: “Only in how they present themselves. If they present themselves in way or
in a manner that shows they are a serious student, then, they get treated as a serious student. But, if they come off as all…that they are not really a professional student, a student that is serious about college, then, they get treated differently.” I asked: “They get treated as a not-professional student?” Kimberly said: “Yes.” I asked: “What does that treatment look like?” Kimberly said: “We have to stay on them…they are the ones that struggle – that are not focused on college.” Kimberly continued: “Let’s put it this way, there are students that know how to play the game. They know how to talk to faculty. They know how to come off to their instructor – so that they are taken seriously.”

Kimberly is expecting that students behave in certain ways – they know how to act. I must admit, that I am not sure I knew how to act as I left high school and made my way to college. Actually, I am sure I did not know how to act – perhaps this is why, at the time, I gave up after a year and half of college? Perhaps I did not really know how to act; how to play the game. I didn’t know a game was being played.

Janice emphasized that she knew the successful student by the ones that act in expected ways – those that take the initiative to reach out to her. Janice said the successful students are those "willing to communicate with instructors if they are struggling…[Those] students willing to keep their instructors in the know of what is going on is important for their success." Adrienne also identified the successful student as the "good and engaged" student. Adrienne spoke of seeing the students that had "made it" and they were often the ones that demonstrated early that they were serious about college. Adrienne also said they were "paying attention" early on. Emma identifies the successful student in her classroom as the "university type". She described the successful student as the one who looked like a typical four-year student. This is the one that attends class, completes assignments and passes the exams.
There also surfaced out of the narratives perception that specific actions of students could indicate future success. The individual who performs the role of student, and does so according in certain ways, is the one more likely to succeed. For example, Tom said:

If I was going to profile the [successful student], it is the one that is going to acquire the book very early, the student who brings the book to the class on the first day, opposed to the student who three weeks after the first assignment is handed in is still saying well, I don't have the book yet. The student who is going to leave themselves time.

For Tom, students who came to class with the book in hand are the ones that are more likely to successfully complete his class. Nick is another who has ideas of the successful student that are tied to ways of behaving, way of acting. When I asked if there are characteristics of students that tend to be more successful, he said:

Honestly, it is interesting, because the students that typically sit in the first row are typically the students that engage at a higher level. They may not necessarily be academically the best, but they do well. They do sufficiently well. They are always the first ones to answer; they are the first ones to talk with me before or after class. I have noticed the students that have a tendency to sit in the back are the ones that sometimes… possibly lack the confidence. Maybe a little intimidated. Intimidated in the sense that when we ask questions we put people on the spot. If you don't know the answer, I mean, you don't feel [very good] about yourself.

A question becomes: does the student who sits in the back feel like they don’t belong? Does this student feel like they are not in an environment to which they belong? Kimberly, like Nick, thinks, when asked to embellish about the ideal student, said that the successful student is the front-row type. Kimberly said "the student who attends class, asks questions, does the
homework, prepares reasonably well for tests is the engaged student." Kimberly, along with Janice, Tom, Adrienne and others, seems to anticipate that the successful student is the one that exhibits certain behaviors, certain characteristics – the one that acts a certain way. The funds of knowledge framework prescribes that the cultural context shapes community members into viewing the world in a certain way – just as many of the participants are viewing the good student.

The next pattern goes to another idea the participants brought to the surface in talking about the successful student. The idea indicates faculty identifies successful students with those whose behaviors include that of a hard worker. These ideas are developed next.

**Pattern two: "They work hard."** The narratives of most all (seven of nine) the participants reveals their funds of knowledge includes perceptions that successful students are those who exhibit behaviors, characteristics, or something that is equated to the individual who works hard. Interestingly, some of the participants had difficulty in describing what was meant by hard-working. Patricia spoke to the need for students to have sufficient time to allocate to educational activities. She also said that good students were the ones with time to expend on college-related activities; and they used the time wisely by having a plan. Specifically, she said the good student is "really hard working and sets timely short and long-term goals. And [they are] able to get their finances in order." When I asked her more about the financial aspects, she said: "If they have to work, they do not have the time to study. That is what happens." Patricia seems to be asserting that if they (students) have to work, they cannot work hard on college. Patricia's profile of the successful student is one that seems be more traditional - the student who comes to college focused on college.
Kimberly connected hard-working behaviors with students who demonstrate an expectation of success. Moreover, according to Kimberly, the student who has an expectation of success will do whatever it takes to complete assigned activities of the course. When I asked Kimberly to describe the behaviors, she initially did so through a negative example, which included the use of an underrepresented student. Kimberly said:

The biggest challenge that is different [for underrepresented students] is that they don’t necessarily have an expectation of success. [They come in thinking] I am trying to do this – I am hoping to do this. Okay, so it is not working out [college] so maybe I can’t do this. Whereas other students are: I will be doing this! It is just a question of how I am going to get there. Or how I am going to go about it. So, I think sometimes that can be a big [factor] – I am hoping. I am hoping. But I am not planning, I am not expecting. Not being successful [is an option for underrepresented students]. Where for other students not being successful is not an option. [They say] I will stay up late, I will get a tutor. I’ll do whatever. But not being successful is not an option.

In addition to revealing a belief that certain students have lower expectations, Kimberly reveals a way of thinking about these students. A way of thinking that includes the perception that some students are hoping, while others are doing. The successful student will work hard and have every expectation of completing, while others do not. Tom also used a negative example to describe a hard-working student. Tom initially said about the successful student: “The easy answer to that is the one that tries hard; the one that puts as much effort into it as they need to put into it.” He then went on to say the unsuccessful student is the one that has little time for college – he said they have too many outside distractions to do well. Tom's perception of the hard-working student seems to be the one that is doing well in the class, and is not the one who has a
lot going on. Janice's response concurs with Tom's, and she also uses a negative example to begin the description of a hard-working students. Janice said:

Sometimes you have students that never really did well, and automatically assume they are not going to do well and that can be a self-defeating approach...And then you have students that are hard-working students, achievers, and they expect to do well, they work hard and they do it. So, there is a range of different possibilities [as it relates to students].

Janice's words are also used in summary of this pattern - the perception of the student who is successful at Riverside. She very succinctly asserts the good student is the hard-working student, the organized student, the balanced student. Specifically, she said:

They have to work hard. They have to be willing to work hard. I do think the courses are challenging. Especially given all of the other responsibilities we know they have.

Organized – they have to be really well organized. Not only with the material that I am presenting them with as part of the course, but balancing all of the other things [in their lives].

The participants seem to be connecting the good student to the individual who engages in ways that align with expectations. Perhaps, arising out of the culture of the educational context is an expectation of student behaviors that are similar to those that dominate the extant success scholarship. It seems that the participants view the good student as one that is committed, engaged, goal-oriented (Bensimon, 2007, p. 447) talking and acting in ways that conform to expectations that resemble prevailing ways of thinking about the successful student. Indeed it seems there are images of the ones that will succeed.
Theme Three: Know There Are Students Who Will Struggle: When Hope Is Not Enough

I sat in the classroom of Adrienne on a sunny fall morning anxiously waiting for the class to begin. I was so anxious, I arrived 30 minutes early; so, I waited by attempting to make myself unobtrusive in the back of the classroom, not really being sure how to make myself unobtrusive. Adrienne, the instructor of developmental reading and writing classes at Riverside, was sitting in the front of the classroom seemingly preparing for the start of a developmental reading class. A few students began to arrive as the start-time for the class approached; however, at 10:55am, five minutes before the scheduled start, there were only four or five in attendance. Adrienne said to the few there: “When something is due, everybody runs.” Several more began to arrive. Adrienne begins to call out for assignments to be turned in: “It says on the thing [she was pointing at the syllabus], you are turning it in, turning it in, turning it in!” [She was responding to a student who said: “I did not know it was due today.”] As more students enter the classroom, Adrienne calls out: “Annotated bibliography and packet, annotated bibliography and packet, annotated bibliography and packet, annotated bibliography and packet.” As one student turns his in, Adrienne says: “You had to do two more! Five, five, five!” Several students say they don’t have anything to turn in; from Adrienne: “You guys are killing me! That means you don’t get credit for it. You know that, right?” More students enter; some have something to turn in. Adrienne seems to be quickly reviewing them. She says [in an agitated tone]: “Oh my God! I don’t care...well, I do care. This is not right! You guys are killing me!” –From an observation of Adrienne’s developmental education reading class

Embedded in the narratives of the participants are ideas of the ideal state. This is a state that includes images of connecting with students, and the students who succeed. However, there are also ideas that emerge out of the narratives, and out of observations like the one that introduces
this section, that there are students who are not succeeding, and are not likely to succeed (Adrienne would later tell me that almost every student failed this class). According to the participants, essential knowledge includes knowing there are students who don’t belong, don’t really get it and are not likely to get it. Moreover, perhaps this knowledge originates out of a context that really does include a culture of locating the responsibility for student success and failure on the student. Gonzalez (2005) refers to a definition of culture emerging out of the social sciences as a “holistic configuration of traits and values that shape members into viewing the world in a particular way” (p. 41). Each participant of my study described the challenges of student success in some way that located the responsibility on the student – and it seemed that they were bringing forth a predominant way of thinking. Perhaps these are cultural norms that arise out of a set of values that do shape their ways of perceiving the world. The first pattern presented is that of students who really don’t belong in college

**Pattern one: “You are not going to like these students.”** As I previously provided, most of the participants tended to bring students to the forefront in describing the practice-related knowledge needed to be a community college instructor. They said that knowing the students is an essential part of essential knowledge - an essential part of developing their practice. As we explored, they spoke about the students that are not really supposed to be in the classrooms. They spoke about the student who perhaps does not really belong. From my observations of these classrooms and from the College's enrollment data, there is probability some of the students they are referring to are underrepresented students – like Adrienne's and Kimberly’s classes, where the majority of the students were underrepresented.

The participants of this study assert that many of their students come to the classroom unprepared for college-level study. This is a condition not unique to Riverside Community
College (Peron & Charron, 2006); and it is argued a primary function of the community college is to make ready those who do not possess college-level academic skills (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). However, there seems to be a sense from the participants that some of the underprepared students entering Riverside are never going to be ready – they are academically too far behind. Janice, when asked about the students of her developmental reading and writing classes, said:

…if they have come from a school where the standards were not high to begin with, or they were passed through the system, which I see a lot of these days, then it is really really difficult. We are teaching [developmental education] classes that last a semester – and if a student is reading at below high school level [coming into the community college], then how are they supposed to get to a college-ready level in one semester? That is a huge dilemma, you know, with reading and writing. I don’t know what the solution is, but it is a huge problem. And we are all looking to the community college to fix these problems and get these students ready for these jobs. Well, if they have had eight years of a lack of preparation, you cannot expect to prepare them in two years and get them out into the world. I don’t think that is very realistic.

Emma, when describing her classroom, echoed the perception that there are students in the classrooms of Riverside that are not prepared to be there. Emma said:

We have first generation immigrants. Second generation. Veterans. Workers. I think there is the diversity in race and ethnicity, there is the diversity in age, our average student is 30. And, most importantly, for me in the classroom, is their diversity in skill and ability. Their previous educational preparation...We have placement tests, but students can enroll in classes they are not really qualified to be in - so that means you could not read at a college level, not write at a college level, but be in college credit courses…
Janice and Emma, and Steve and Kimberly (as will be seen in the narratives that follow) all seem to allude to a sense of hopelessness, as, from their perspective, there are students that don’t really belong; they are never going to belong; and there is little faculty can do about it. It can be a hopeless feeling that, for example, African American men experience when they encounter a world that is foreign, a world where things are available to others are not available to them (Perrakis, 2008); where there is a sense of being viewed differently by the societally empowered. For some participants, there is hope for the students who don’t belong, but there is little expectation. This perspective also comes forth out of the classrooms of the College.

As I observed Adrienne’s developmental writing class, she began the session by advising the students that many are not doing the assignments correctly. They are not correctly constructing sentences. Adrienne seemed to be essentially advising her students that some of them did not know how to write. She said to the class: “The third essay is worth double; if you don’t know how to construct a sentence, you will fail.” She fell silent and gazed around the room, seemingly to ensure her message had been received. Several students looked down, up, anywhere but at Adrienne. Adrienne continued (after some dialog with students on the grading system) – she explained to students that for the next essay they are to explore a career choice, including type of career, compensation, education required, and other factors (that I failed to note). It seemed to me that this assignment had aspects that could be interesting to the students. I thought this was an opportunity to explore ideas for the assignment (perhaps this occurred at another time or place), however, Adrienne abruptly shifts the direction of the class. She walked back to her desk and began to look at a stack of papers. She makes reference to looking at their assignments. As she does so, she visibly becomes frustrated, and asks: “Who is responsible for your learning? You. Not me.” She then informs the students: “I am going to give you a structure for the third essay
that you must use.” Adrienne essentially tells the students she is going to tell them how to do it. I looked around the room, and saw one young man reading his Facebook page on the computer in front of him. I thought (and noted): I am not sure this student is going to be told how to do it. Adrienne turns out the lights and walks over to the computer; she projects an image onto the screen in front of the classroom. The font size is small – I cannot read it from the back of the classroom – and neither can some of the students, as several get up from theirs chairs and move closer to the screen with pens and paper in hand. Adrienne informs the students (paraphrased): These are good thesis statements – pick one and use it for your next assignment.

Adrienne, after giving the students a few minutes to look at the statements, then begins to call on students: “Rebecca. What does this statement do?” Rebecca responds: “I don’t know.” Adrienne, looking frustrated (in the still rather dark classroom): “Nobody knows anything!” Adrienne did not call on anyone else to answer the question…nor did she provide an answer. I wonder if it is it important for the students to know what the statement does. If so, why not explore it with the class? If not, why ask in the first place? Adrienne returned to the basic task at hand – she essentially says to pick one of these statements and use it. “Replace what you have done with one of these.” Several students ask if they can use their own – one asks “what if I like what I can come up with”. Adrienne responds: “It does not matter if you like it; it matters if I like it.”

The class session is concluding. Adrienne, still seemingly frustrated by the events of the class, tells her students: “Let’s all cross our fingers that you turn in something good. I hope you all [have something good] to turn in on Monday.” As students are walking out of the classroom, one young women sitting in front of me explains to another: “You are replacing what you wrote with what is up there [pointing to the still projected image on the screen in front of the
The young woman receiving the essential information slowly nods – as if she is digesting the instructions. In the meantime, two or three students go to Adrienne’s desk at the front of the classroom and hand paper(s) to her. Adrienne exclaims: “Oh my God! Oh my God! Leonard (a pseudonym)!“ Leonard says nothing to Adrienne; he turned and walked out of the classroom.

Adrienne expressed hope for students to turn in something good; however, I don’t think she was expecting it. There was not a lot of confidence emitting from Adrienne on this day. Students, like Leonard, that encounter negative interactions can leave the classroom feeling “belittled, overwhelmed, and demoralized” (Cox, 2009, p. 17). These experiences, for the students, become a continuous beat of that is wrong…we don’t that is not the way it is done. The students, like those in Adrienne’s classroom sense that they are incapable; they are made to feel they have little to contribute. It is the students who are made to feel not valued, made to feel incapable, are not provided with an educational environment that is supportive and affirms that they belong, that very often do not succeed (Rendon, 1994, 2002). Conversely, high expectations for success is an essential pedagogical element to enabling an environment of success; success for all students (Cox, 2009). If the student is made to feel capable through encouragement by key people of the campus, like the instructor, there can be instilled a sense of pride and confidence that propels that student to do more than he or she thought possible.

As I would later learn, very few of the students in Adrienne’s developmental writing class succeeded. Adrienne would advise me in an end-of-semester interview that, essentially, the semester was a disaster.

They don’t belong because they don’t want to belong. The participants of this study also bring forward the idea that there are students who do not succeed because they come to the
classroom not really wanting to succeed. According to Steve, "Sometimes you have the students with the roadblocks. [The students] who say: no matter what you do, no matter what you do, I am going to complain. [I say] go ahead and complain." Nick said: "I was told you are not going to like these students. Because they are lazy. Because you are going to see how unmotivated they are." It is important to note that Nick provides a clue as to the role of the social environment in essential knowledge and ways of thinking about the students. Nick heard when he first came to Riverside as a faculty member, from fellow faculty members, that some Riverside students are lazy; they are not likeable. Nick provides evidence of social norms that includes deficit ways of thinking about students. For this faculty member, it seems that social integration into the College includes ideas of low expectations for the students.

Others bring this way of thinking to the surface, as they warn that certain Riverside students are not motivated. Kimberly, when asked about her underrepresented students, said: “Minority students don’t know how to hustle. They don’t know how to do the things the successful student does.” I responded: “But, isn’t it the case that the college environment may not embrace the experiences and effectively use? Kimberly interjects with: “That may be true, however, other students come to college not knowing what to do too…but they hustle. They learn what to do. I am telling you [she pauses] minority students don’t hustle.”

The implication from Kimberly is that minority students come to the community college with a gap in ways of thinking or abilities that is unlikely resolved due, in some part, to an unwillingness or perhaps inability to exert expected behaviors. However, perhaps the issue lies in the way the students are being regarded by campus members. When an individual is made to feel out of place in the educational environment, they often act out of place. For example, the scholarship reveals that when students, especially students who have placed on margins by
educators, sense they are being treated differently, perhaps treated as incompetent, then they are likely to withdraw from actively participating in social and academic activities (Rendon, 1994, 2002). Perhaps if the student is made to feel that they are not behaving in expected ways, not hustling, not appreciated, then they will disengage. Conversely, if, for example, an African American or Latino student encounters encouragement, affirmation that they are valued, then these validating experiences can result in achievement on many levels for the student and the teacher (Rendon, 1994, 2002). It seems from the consistency in the responses from the participants that it is not unusual for students historically on the margins to encounter an environment that does not tend to affirm they belong. It seems that community college faculty funds of knowledge may not include the ability to create an inclusive environment for all students. Next is a pattern that closely resembles this one. The pattern of this section is more about the students that may not belong, the next one is about students who may to have the ability, but don't know what to do with it.

Pattern two: "Some just don't get it." This pattern is essentially the participants saying, from their perspective, there are students who don't do what they are supposed to do. According to Steve, faculty need to know that "some just don't get it." According to many of the participants, there are students who are either unwilling or unable to perform activities prescribed by the instructor. For some of the participants, it is about students not responding. The participants tended to characterize the responsiveness issue as students not putting forth sufficient effort. It could also be characterized as a failure to connect with students. For example, Adrienne talks about having students who are not using the resources she has made available; they are not performing in expected ways – they are not participating in ways that are expected. Adrienne said:
And so I don't know if I yelled at them [smiling] about that when you were there, but I have told them about not using their resources effectively. You know, so if I spend time putting the information up on website and they don’t use it, then that is frustrating to me. And also, it impacts their grade, because it is like…you are not using…why wouldn’t you use your resources, you think you have to come up with everything? And then their argument is: well I didn't understand how to do it.

And when I asked about the possibility of students not having access to the technology needed to use the resources, Adrienne responded:

I ask who has a computer and who doesn't. So I know…and for the most part I get between 80 and 90 percent compliant. Where they either have a computer at home or have access to a computer. So, when I say access to a computer they can use the computer labs here or at a public library. And then another 2 to 5 percent that say they don’t have [computer access]. I say, well you are on campus so you can go down there [she points in the direction of where there is a computer lab]. [And the student says] well no, I have to be at work. And I said: you know what? I did that. I said: I worked from 9 to 1, took my lunch from 10 to 11 to come to class here on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and then went back to work. So, I understand that, but at 1 o’clock I came back to do my homework - because I did not have a computer either. So…you know…I said: if you really want to get out you will find a way.

Adrienne asserts, at the end of the above narrative, that students need to find a way - they need to make the effort. Absent in the narrative is attempt at understanding more about the student’s ability to access and use available resources like the technology, which can create challenges for students (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). It becomes the student’s
responsibility to find the needed resources. As previously stated, there seems to be a prevailing norm amongst the study’s participants of student responsibility for effectively engaging in ways that afford participation. Steve also talks about the students who do not act in expected ways.

Steve talks about the students who are seemingly not connecting with him. He said:

I write them a paragraph for each paper they hand in, so I respond back and I say you are still having these problems because I saved the last paragraph I wrote to you and it still has the same thing in it. So, here is additional work, and I always tell them the additional work I give them is not graded because I have already constructed a syllabus and it doesn’t have anything in it about additional work; so I give it to them because if they want to get better they will practice and they will get better. And some of them will do it and some of them won’t, and, you know [pauses] often I will reach that point where I will say I am willing to go the extra mile for this group over here and that group over there, you know, they will do what they will do, because that this point in the semester I know they are not going to do the extra work. You know? It can be frustrating.

Steve seems to be indicating a perception that the lack of response is a failure to connect with certain students – a failure for some of the students to connect with him, which leads to a belief the response will never come. Other participants tended to identify aspects of students who fail to connect that can be classified as behaving in ways not conducive to positive outcomes. Perhaps behaving in ways that are not unexpected by faculty. Adrienne talks about students who demonstrate they don't get it by their actions outside the classroom:

And one student yesterday…comes into the class and says I have an iPhone – and I said yes and where is your book? And he just like put his head down and I said don’t even…and it gets to a point where if a student is really struggling I put copies of the book
in the library that they can [have access]. And if a student is really struggling they will come and see me and talk to me, and [say] I really don’t have the money, I really can’t [afford it]. Then I will make accommodations, I will…especially if I have checked with Financial Aid and their financial aid hasn't come in... But these guys, I know where they’re at, and they don’t know that I know. So that is the other part, because they keep saying it is just so expensive; and the one guy that got the new iPhone yesterday…I said: I thought you were the one complaining about it being expensive...

Indeed this student, it seems from Adrienne's perspective, made a choice that indicated, to her, that he was not focused on being successful in college. Adrienne’s essential knowledge includes ideas, or values, which are different than the student’s. This student, it seems from her perspective, made getting an iPhone more important than getting the book; and therefore, the phone was more important than college. What Adrienne did not seem to know, was why the student made the decision he made. Perhaps there were significant factors that may have rendered the decision logical. Instead, from Adrienne’s point of view, this student is placed into a category of one that is unwilling or unable (or both) – and the message of being cast as someone who does not get it is clearly conveyed to the student. Significantly, underrepresented students encountering experiences of this nature often are confused and frustrated; frequently to the extent that they are unable to effectively participate (Rendon, 2002). The student is likely to pull away, is likely to not respond in an environment that fails to recognize the values they bring to the classroom; whatever those values may be. Marcia also refers to students who failed to connect in a developmental writing class. Marcia said:

I also had some students who turned in very little work. Remember the baseball player in the class you observed? [I nodded assent.] He failed the class, as did many of my athletes.
They were a disaster – they thought they could do nothing and still pass. The baseball player asked me what he could do…I told him there was nothing he could do. And, he needed to pass his classes in order to stay eligible to play – and now he is not. Unbelievable.

Kimberly's seems to have perception of student that includes the individual who is not motivated by the experience of learning; they are in college for some ulterior motive and then and move on. College becomes, according to Kimberly, something that students try to squeeze into their schedule – often unsuccessfully. The implication is belief that the failed connection is inevitable - some students are not going to engage with the campus because their motivations are different, and they are not going to prioritize college activities. She said: "They don’t have a lot of time to engage; they are not motivated by a love of learning. That is not why they are taking the class. It is more about necessity…and so that changes what they are willing to put into it."

The next pattern continues with an underlying idea that weaves its way through this theme, which is that the participant’s knowledge of their students seems superficial. Bensimon (2007) surfaces the idea that capacity-building funds of knowledge, or the essential knowledge required to carry out some function, is often built on thick, multi-stranded, relationships; however, as she said, it could be asserted that the relationships students and teachers tend to be thin. There is evidence of my study that reveals this condition of thin knowledge faculty have with students, which continues to emerge in the next pattern.

**Pattern three: Some will "just drift off."** This pattern goes to the idea expressed by several of the participants that there are students in their classroom that are going to soon not be there. The participant's essential knowledge includes perceptions that some students will experience feelings of despair; they will be overwhelmed to the extent that they leave. Steve,
who is talking about students who come to entry-level developmental classes and are really struggling, students who are struggling to read and write (at any level), said that he tries to get them to see a tutor, however (Steve said):

Sadly enough, those are the students who generally just kind of disappear; by about week 4 or week 5 they’ll miss enough classes…they just drift off. They realize [Steve pauses], it is not that they don’t understand things; they realize that I am not going to pass this course. It is going to take a tremendous amount of work for me to pass this course, so, I think I will just drift off into nowhere, and it is sadly what happens to most of them. A couple of them every semester really hang on, and really struggle, and really fight, and sometimes they have little small victories where they might progress a little bit into the next level of developmental. And sometimes you have to say okay you really progressed a lot this semester, but not enough to get into the next level – don’t get frustrated…but you have to do this again. So it’s tough.

Embedded in the words of Steve is the perception that most of the developmental students he teaches are not going to successfully complete the course – there really does seem to be a sense of low expectation for the students that most need support and encouragement. There seems to be a sense that many of the students are lost. This feeling of lost was pervasive in the classrooms of Riverside. It seemed that many of the students of Adrienne’s developmental writing class were so disinterested; so disengaged from the instructor and from each other. There were students that seemed not to know or not to care about information and assignments posted in Blackboard (the course management system). There were students who turned in work and were told it was wrong. One student evidentially needed five of something; and he did not have five. Others did not, according to the instructor, know how to write in expected ways. The entire class was a
collective, as advised by Adrienne, of “nobody (that) knows anything.” Still others spent this particular class-period looking at the computer that sat on the desk in front of them. One student spent much of the class time looking at his Facebook page. It seemed to me that I sat in that classroom with many students that were destined to drift off, as there was really little reason for them to be there. There existed similar condition in Kimberly’s class. There were students who did nothing – perhaps they just did not know what to do. Perhaps they were finding nothing interesting about the class. There are, according the scholarship, ways to make the classroom interesting for all students. For example, Gay (2002) argues that practitioners can make college interesting and stimulating for students by developing pedagogy that situates learning activities in the lived experiences of the students. In other words, ability to develop culturally relevant pedagogy as a component of faculty funds of knowledge may create a more effective learning experience for all students. Instead, there are many instructors who believe that their subjects, like math, cannot be infused with material that juxtaposes the world of the student with the classroom. The student who found the Steve Jobs video the longest 15 minutes of his life was likely not able to relate or connect anything about the video to his world. He essentially informed Adrienne and the class that the video was meaningless. The student who voiced his opinion of the video was a young African American male; perhaps here was a student who was trying to find something interesting about the class. Perhaps he was trying to find a reason for being there; perhaps he was trying to make sense of what he was hearing and seeing. One of the participants of this study, Nick, thinks that the instructors need to take greater responsibility for helping students to succeed; which is explored next.
Nick is a participant who also recognizes, and has experienced, students who drift off. However, when students fail to respond, when they disengage from the instructor, Nick thinks that perhaps the instructors of Riverside need to look inward. Specifically, Nick said:

I think a lot of times it has to do with us, the instructors, because I believe if we have a student that is not performing well, we tell them they have not met the objectives or the criteria, it does not change the concept, we are just identifying their faults, their struggles. But we are not really addressing the big picture. And when they produce another [paper], they work hard, they give it their all, and again we say, again, you failed. Usually by the third attempt they choose not to engage at the level [with the instructor]. Their self-esteem is gone; they have total self-helplessness and they are thinking, wait a minute, no matter what I do I cannot compete, I cannot move up, it is not going to happen.

Nick later said: “I think that often we [members of the college community] say, okay, go ahead and see a counselor, here is the name. But they [the student] won't.” Nick seems to be giving us his perceptions that could be a reflection of the normative environment of the College. As prescribed by the funds of knowledge framework, which indicates that the local context often produces ways of knowing (Hogg, 2011), there is evidence in the narratives, through consistency in the responses, that the norm is to send students for help knowing that some, perhaps many, will not follow through. There seems to be common knowledge, perhaps mediated by the social environment, that some students will drift off. Adrienne, Kimberly, Janice, and Tom also spoke about knowing that some students would likely not follow recommendation to see their instructor or go to some academic support area. More importantly, there does not seem to be anything being done about the problem. There was a sense of…we know the process does not really work for many students, however, it is not really my problem.
Moreover, it is not just faculty who talk about the issues with students. From my observation of Dean Richards’ meeting with faculty, there was discussion about the student of Riverside that tended to come from a negative perspective. Dean Richards described the Riverside student as one who will have parents that are not as involved in their sons and daughters' education. They will have parents working multiple jobs. They will have faced many more challenges than the higher-income students. Dean Richards then wondered aloud if expectations were being lowered for these students. She wondered – “are we perpetuating inequity by lowering expectations?” The dean, in the dialog, seemed to be conveying a view that the Riverside student is often a student who comes to college with experiences that are different from others. She also encouraged the faculty to seek ways to create meaningful learning experiences for all students. However, after the dean finishing speaking the silence in the room was deafening. No one said a word. Eventually, the dean moved on to the next topic. It seemed in the context of that forum, a microcosm of the social environment, that the predominant words were about the issues of the Riverside student. Indeed it seemed to be a normative way of thinking that they Riverside students have a lot going on and will struggle.

A different perspective in supporting students, however, is provided by Nick. When asked about his role in helping students to find help, he, at least once, took a different tactic; he describes a situation where he did not just refer a student to supporting services provided by the College, he took a student to get additional support. Nick said:

I had a student that came to me and said I am having major problems in life. And the information she gave me was very personal – and I am not equipped to help with these types of problems...I offered that she might want to consider talking to a counselor or
someone... and so I personally took her to the counselor. Initially I took her to the wrong counselor, but I got her to the right one.

Nick provides example of direct intervention, of focused and personal support, which is known to benefit students (for example, Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin & Castro, 2010; Hagedorn, Perrakis & Maxwell, 2006). Still, there are few examples of this nature in the data – again, indicating that the social environment may help to facilitate common ways of thinking that includes the knowledge that some students will not go for help. Kimberly, next, adds support to this pattern when she talks about students who don’t recover.

For underrepresented students in developmental education, there can be, according to Kimberly, a feeling of impending doom. When the student who has little confidence starts to slip, they often don't recover. Kimberly said, when I asked her if attempted interventions to help struggling students (especially underrepresented students) works:

It is effective sometimes. Though not always – not even very often. Sometimes it will work for one student. The problem is that I will talk with the student about the need to find time for school work. We will talk about the work that is required, and how much time it might take to do the work required. Then we’ll talk about a plan; how are you going to find the time to do the needed work? How are you going to make sure you do the work and don’t fail this class? And the student will say something like - I will set aside an hour here and an hour there for school stuff. And they may actually do it for a week or two. Then, they get distracted and they don't do the work and they start to slip, and slip, and they often don't recover.

Kimberly continued: Some of the recurring things I here from students is, I have to work. My daughter needs to be picked up from childcare. My car is not working. You name it, I
have heard it. There is only so much I can do [Kimberly pauses] I mean, the school work has to get done. Also, I was reading about a study that found the teacher is approximately 20% of the student’s experience in college. The teacher is involved in 20% of the student’s college life and therefore affecting their success, and the rest is outside our control.

Kimberly seems to be locating responsibility for outcomes on the student. In an observation of Marcia's class, she advised students, many of whom were underrepresented, that they may want to consider removing themselves from the class. As the class was ending, she said: “There are several of you that are lacking points - which stands to reason as you have not turned much of anything in. So, I will remind you that today is the last day to drop this class.”

Steve, like Marcia, has experience, and expectation, that there will be students who will not keep up with assignments and will not do well in the class. Steve said:

I can tell you to the one or two students [italics added] right now who will pass the course. I can say now – he’ll pass, she’ll pass, he’ll pass …[that student] naaa…not so much…just based on what they have done so far… Because if it is seven weeks into the semester and they are this way, I am guessing the next seven weeks are not going to change to dramatically. Every once in a while though a student will go: hey, I just got my mid-term grade back. And I’ll go, yeah, when you have 0 out of 140 points for homework because you have turned nothing in, you are probably not doing so well in the course. And, yeah, you bombed the mid-term because you were not here on our prep day and, I am not sure what you are surprised by.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of Steve’s words (above) is that so few are expected to succeed. Moreover, those that are expected to slip and not recover, those that are directed to
counseling or tutoring and never go, those that don’t always behave in expected ways, those that are not really going to be liked, those in the context of this study are often the very student that most needs the support of the campus community. Those students are the students that most need the opportunity higher education brings – the ones that we most seem to want to ignore. Significantly, for Steve, Kimberly, Marcia, and other participants, it seems that the ways of thinking about students aligns with the extant success literature. Literature that includes the seminal work by Pascarella and Terinzini (2005), who, in their review of studies that relate to the ways in which college affects students, found: “One of the most unequivocal conclusions (in the literature)…is that the impact of college is largely determined by individual effort and involvement in the academic…and extracurricular offerings on a campus (p. 602).” Indeed this study’s narratives supporting this theme and others provides evidence that faculty funds of knowledge includes the idea that students are responsible to initiate engagement with the campus environment – and for the developmental students, the underrepresented students, many will not do so. There is perception of essential knowledge that locates responsibility on the student to engage, hoping they will do so, and knowing that some won’t. It seems for some students, there is no hope.

I close this section with acknowledging that although the unit of analysis for this study was faculty years of experience, this aspect did not reveal significant differences in ways of thinking amongst faculty participants with different years of experience. There were not significant differences in ways of thinking between those who have more experience and those who have less experience. An unknown influence could have been experience in other contexts. The focus of this study was on experience at Riverside; perhaps my participants had acquired experience at other institutions that was significant and influenced these findings.
Theme Four: Formal Sources of Knowledge at Riverside

We usually have an energetic dialog at these meetings. Faculty offer their ideas, I offer mine. Sometimes we are on the same page, sometimes not. –Dean Richards, on meeting with faculty

One purpose of this inquiry is to explore sources of knowledge for faculty. This theme goes to the question of knowledge sources and like the others was developed through the lens of the funds of knowledge framework. In summarizing key aspects that relate to sources of knowledge, the framework for this study indicates that practical knowledge is highly contextualized, often developed in a communal environment (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002). Therefore, according to the framework, knowledge development is formed through the lens of the individual --it is a personal experience-- in a local context. The experiences of life are a primary contributor to the development of knowledge. Moje et al. (2004) argue that funds of knowledge sources from "homes, peer groups and other systems and networks of relationships" (p. 38); in other words, knowledge is acquired out of everyday aspects of living and by communicating with people who are knowledgeable and are willing to share.

From the interviews with the participants, there is evidence of connected social structures at Riverside. There is evidence of a functioning social environment on which knowledge is mediated. The sources of knowledge that are found within the social world of Riverside faculty organize into two types, those that are more informal in nature, which will be covered in theme five, and those that are more formal, and are covered in this theme. The formal sources of knowledge are mostly associated with the routine congregation of College people, often at organized events. These formal sources include meetings, professional development workshops and others. The first pattern addresses the formal source of people being invited to attend a group
forum that has some expressed purpose. There is some defined reason that people are getting together.

**Pattern one: Meetings and committees.** Five of the participants of this study asserted sources of essential knowledge at Riverside Community College include meetings, committee participation, and other more formal occasions of faculty gathering in common locations for some predetermined purpose. Effectively, the gatherings are a part of the social structures, and they facilitate knowledge-sharing connections amongst the College people. Importantly, and connecting to the funds of knowledge framework, the knowledge-sharing occurs amongst people who share common interests and have common goals, thereby creating the conditions for, the perception of, authentic dialog in an environment of trust (Velez-Ibanez, 1988; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). It is from the routine gathering of people who have purpose to expand their capacity of practical knowledge that the conditions are created to develop thick, multi-stranded, relationships that tend to persist (Hogg, 2011; Moll, Amanti & Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). The result is a network of people where knowledge is shared and the capacity, the capabilities, of the membership increases. It is in the context of thick relationships where practitioner's funds of knowledge are likely to develop and prosper over time.

The faculty of Riverside Community College have the opportunity to meet on a regular basis. For example, the academic departments, which typically include the chair and the faculty of the English department, meet each month during the non-summer terms (fall and spring). These meetings bring together people who have shared interest in particular academic disciplines and/or programs. Steve, when asked about the department meetings, said that he attends, as an English instructor, meetings of the English department as well as meetings organized by the Dean of College Preparation, who is responsible for developmental education at Riverside.
Riverside centralizes responsibility for developmental education; the dean can draw on faculty throughout the college to teach developmental classes. When asked about the nature of the meetings, Steve said: "I go to the English department meetings, and we’ll talk… Here is a situation that has been coming up in a few of your courses, let’s talk about how we are going to manage that." He added the meetings help to facilitate frequent interaction amongst the faculty. The meetings are one source of creating a sense of shared purpose and camaraderie amongst the faculty. They seemed an important source of practical information to Steve. Tom and Janice also asserted that department meetings were a valuable source of learning and sharing.

There are dean's meetings that also seem to create knowledge-sharing opportunities not only amongst full-time faculty, but also with the adjuncts. Tom, when talking about ways of learning at Riverside, spoke about the meetings of the division of College of Preparation: "[They provide] the opportunity to get together and discuss issues with developmental studies. So, she [the dean] has been trying very hard to facilitate more communication amongst the full-time and the part-time faculty." Marcia said she thought the dean's meetings were "mostly productive"; she made the point that, in the division of college preparation, it is all about trying to get students to college-level reading, writing and math. Therefore, the dean's meetings provided a forum for faculty who are responsible to support students in preparation for college-level courses.

I had the opportunity to observe a meeting of the College Preparation division, led by Dean Richards (a pseudonym). Dean Richards advised me beforehand, when I asked permission to attend, of the nature of the meetings. Dean Richards said: "We usually have an energetic dialog at these meetings. Faculty offer their ideas, I offer mine. Sometimes we are on the same page, sometimes not. However, I think we do have meaningful dialog about how to create an environment of learning for the students." The meeting I attended was attended by 15 faculty.
The dean indicated later that this was a normal turnout (she conducted several meetings in order to allow as many to participate as possible, as there is little common availability amongst faculty in the midst of a semester).

As the dean's meeting began, Dr. Richards stood in front of the room looking like a teacher ready to conduct class. She stood at the front of a rather dull, tan-colored conference room. In terms of content, as the dean advised, much of the meeting was faculty and the dean exchanging ideas; sharing thoughts about what is right and what is wrong with their worlds. For example, Dr. Richards spent considerable time talking about the rising cost of books, and how it is likely exacerbating an already problematic situation for many students. She wondered aloud if the cost of books was driving students on the margins away from higher education. She said to the faculty:

Do you really need a 300-page textbook that costs over $100? Are we really considering the student who must try and pay for tuition, fees, and then for the textbook that costs more than $100? I have spoken with several publishers and there may be an opportunity to customize these books - perhaps taking chapters out and reducing cost.

Dean Richards’s perspective comes from one of a community college administrator whose students are those in developmental education - they are the students more likely to come from lower income families (Peron & Charron, 2006). Dean Richards' students are more likely to be challenged by the cost of college. Her musing on books prompted a dialog with several of the attendees. One asserted that some of her materials were self-developed and no cost to the student. The attendee said: "I try to make sure all of my students have the base materials for the class. Some students will have the textbook and some won't. It is a fact of life." Another said that the College had talented faculty who have the ability to write their own textbooks; providing a
more economical way of providing materials to students. She said: "We should write our own." From my observation, the entire meeting was comprised of exchanges of this nature; where faculty took as much meeting time speaking as the dean. From my perspective, it was an interactive and energetic session – an exchange of ideas - just as Dean Richards said it would be.

Patricia informed me that committee meetings were another source of knowledge sharing at Riverside. She found being a part of a group charged with obtaining a grant provided the opportunity to learn from peers. She said: "I did get the opportunity to work on a grant for the college – to identify and work with students who were unsuccessful to see if we could build our retention rate. We did that for three semesters. Participating on the committee really developed [certain] skills [for me]." Several of the participants referred to the College's Achieving the Dream initiative, and the committees supporting it, as providing opportunities to learn. The initiative, according to Kimberly, brought administrators and faculty together to talk about developing success strategies for students. The discussion led to policy changes at Riverside. For example, it was out of this initiative, according to Kimberly, that a change was made to allow faculty to dismiss student for excessive absences. Adrienne indicated a policy was developed out of the discussions that changed placement-testing procedures. Perhaps reflecting the thick social environment of the College, the policy of dismissing students who miss a certain number of classes is referenced in most every syllabus received from the participants. Another more formal source of developing essential knowledge is presented in the next pattern. This one is a programmatic source of knowledge.

**Pattern two: Professional development.** The mediation of knowledge for faculty at Riverside, in addition to those described in pattern one, also seems to be conducted through professional development activities. From the participants of this study, it was learned that
Riverside offers, what is deemed, a fairly expansive set of seminars, workshops, and webinars for faculty. The professional development function at Riverside is provided by a department that is focused on the function. The department, called (I have changed the name to a more generic reference in order to preserve confidentiality) The Center for Faculty Professional Development (CFPD), annually provides hundreds of sessions for faculty on topics that range from pedagogy to curriculum to technology training (Center for Faculty Professional Development, 2012).

Individuals who are or have been faculty lead the CFPD. The aspect of a faculty-led professional development department is potentially significant, as it seems to have created an environment of trust for the participants. By having faculty participate in professional development activities with trusted sources in a familiar context—the CFPD training room looks somewhat like a classroom in terms of seating layout, computers and audio-visual capabilities—it would seem that there is greater likelihood of creating an environment conducive to developing and sharing essential knowledge. According to Tom, the faculty professional development center offers sessions where "faculty from other departments give lectures on constructing a syllabus, or classroom management. Things that were not necessarily specific to my discipline but were specific to teaching. Those were very helpful [as sources of learning] as well." Again, there is an environment for faculty to learn from peers where, like the Latino families of Southeastern Arizona who built a rich network for sharing practical knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992), it is likely to be considered legitimate sources of knowledge. Janice, Nick and Emma, when asked about where faculty can learn more about the art and science of teaching at Riverside, affirmed Tom's view by indicating the CFPD offers programs of value. The department offers programs that support the development of teaching skills. Nick specifically, when asked about the programs, said: "There are lot of seminars and workshops that faculty can
attend. The workshops are both face-to-face and available via webinar – so it is convenient.”

Nick's view is that the CFPD has been a valuable resource for faculty.

In order to get a very basic understanding of the adoption of faculty for the CFPD, I requested information on attendance. The information was provided by the director of the department, and the records reflected that 3,564 total (non-unique) participants have attended sessions at the center since it opened in August of 2009. The attendance by faculty and staff suggests it is serving the purpose of enriching the knowledge network of the College's instructors. The director of the CFPD indicated the participation has encouraged College leadership to put additional funding into the department. Another source of professional development at Riverside College that Steve, Emma and Janice spoke about is a faculty-training program. The two-day program provides new faculty members with essential information on resources, recommended ways to create the syllabus at Riverside, and pedagogy. According to Emma, the program provides information on:

Using the early alert system [a computer-based system developed by the College where faculty can flag students who are having issues] – to alert students of dangers, or wonders [smiling] that they have accomplished. We have had times where other faculty have talked about teaching, or about…even about online learning or hybrid forms of learning and being effective in those environments. As well as a couple of talks we have had on underrepresented students – or the challenges our students come with. And I think that was very thoughtful on the part of the College.

Indeed the professional development programs of Riverside, for the participants, seem to be a source of persistent connections amongst the faculty - they seem to be an accepted component of information by faculty, therefore serving to strengthen their social network. Moje et al. (2004)
argue it is when those with common interests form professional relationships that are supported by the systems and structures of the social environment that opportunities to accrue essential knowledge are optimized. As Raul, a faculty member leading a session on the use of interactive whiteboards (a classroom technology), said to the attendees (who are his peers): "This stuff is amazing. We are learning how to bring lessons alive! We are learning how to think in different ways - ways that are going to help our students." I was captivated by Raul’s energy, his passion for infusing technology into the classroom. From my perspective, Raul may have just made the network slightly stronger.

**Theme Five: Informal Sources of Knowledge**

*I can go into any one of these offices and say hey how do you do this if this situation comes up? –Steve, talking about knowledge sharing at Riverside Community College*

The funds of knowledge framework, as previously described, indicates that the ways in which we learn, and what we learn, is contextual. In other words, what is learned and how it is learned occurs in the context of the individual’s environment. It is developed through the interaction within a given social structure. The acquisition of knowledge occurs through access to the appropriate sources. Whereas theme four focused more on formalized sources within the Riverside environment, this theme is about sources that are more informal. It is about the informal knowledge sources of Riverside Community College developed by persistent and trusted connections made in more casual settings. The patterns that follow provide evidence of the social environment enabling knowledge sharing by community members (faculty) who know something of practical value and are willing to share it. There is evidence the funds knowledge of faculty is enriched by more informal encounters. The first pattern is about acquiring the know-how to instruct students by simply reaching out.
Pattern one: Connecting in places and spaces. The participants of this study assert knowledge sharing can occur almost anytime, almost anywhere at Riverside. There is evidence of an environment that can be conducive to exchanging thoughts and ideas amongst the faculty. These encounters occur more informally. Still, they are, according to the participants, productive as they can facilitate the organic development of practical knowledge. They can facilitate the development of the knowledge required to be a community college instructor. Sometimes, it is by "getting up out of your chair", asserts Marcia, and talking to someone about a problem that good ideas are nurtured. Moreover, the value of the exchange is likely enhanced if there are reliable and trusted sources involved (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). The conversation is likely to be more valuable when those involved have a relationship grounded in mutual respect and integrity, thereby adding density and strength to the network on which knowledge is transmitted. Steve, for example, asserts that such a network of trusted members does exist at Riverside. From his perspective, it is through an informal network of College people, of primarily peer faculty, that he builds his capacity of essential knowledge. Specifically, Steve said:

So it is nice to have resources around here. I can go into any one of these offices and say hey how do you do this if this situation comes up? And we will talk about it [issues] all the time. And I go to [others], and we’ll talk - here is a situation that has been coming up in a few of [my] courses, let’s talk about how [I can] manage that. So we do have a network here. Not a formalized network, but an informal network of colleagues here.

When I asked Steve to elaborate on the types of conversations he has with his peers, he described situations that indicated reciprocity, which is another important element of developing trusted sources of information amongst members of a community (Velez-Ibanez, 1988).
Reciprocity, the act of exchanging valued knowledge, establishes a bond, a kinship amongst people. In other words, reciprocity establishes confidence and trust (Rios-Aguilar, 2010). For Steve, it makes him feel useful and trusted when others come to him for guidance - it seems to make him feel that he is a part of a shared community of informed individuals. He described, when recalling types of conversations with peers who come to him for help, a scenario of he and peers gathered in the English department offices, and questions being asked like: "What do I do when the student doesn’t show up three days in a row? What do I do when a student is disruptive? Things like that. [And] we say, oh, here is how you handle the classroom management stuff, don't worry about it, here is how we handle it."

Patricia also spoke about reciprocating with peer faculty in hallway conversations. She indicated she was having difficulties with the classroom technology, and it was from having an informal conversation with a peer "I finally learned how to use it". She added that she too was a knowledge source for others; indicating: "we [faculty] talk about it [issues] and I say I would do this or that [offer advice]." Patricia continued that she uses email as a means to reach out to others, just to ask if they are doing okay. She said: "It is hard [sometimes to connect] because our schedules don't mesh - but, I will shoot them [peer faculty] an email and ask them: how are things? Drop in and see me." Janice adds to this pattern, as she talked about her experiences when she began her tenure at Riverside:

It can be really intimidating when you first are an instructor. You don't know what you are doing. I felt really supported. They [peer faculty] shared everything...everything from syllabi to...I am having this problem with this student and what do you recommend. So, yes, I think faculty is really supportive of each other.
Janice, in the course of acknowledging the challenges that confront new faculty, tells us how she used the resources of the college for help. She found people willing to help as one source in developing her practice. Marcia talked about reaching out via email to many peers when she was given a teaching assignment that was foreign. She said:

This is my first semester in ten years teaching 102, so I surveyed the audience: what do you do with this? What do you do with this? What do you do with this? And then I’ll act accordingly. And then if it [does not work] for my teaching style, then I’ll redo it or whatever.

As it is argued throughout the funds of knowledge literature, knowledge is highly contextual. It is through a localized social structure that shared ways of thinking and knowing are formed. However, the individual is just that - an individual. For Emma, it was important to her to find like-minded people when she first started at Riverside. Emma seemed selective in developing her group of trusted sources. Specifically, when I asked her who helped her learn about how things are done at Riverside, Emma said: “My colleagues. Certainly there were people in my department and that I met in other departments where there was a conversation that I thought, oh, this person gets it. And I have been able to sustain those relationships.”

Emma perceived there are faculty, just like students, who get it - and those who got it became her trusted sources. Emma sought out people whose ways of thinking were similar to hers; they shared similar ideas about students and ways to instruct students. From my experience at the College, Emma had several faculty members who spoke highly of her – who encouraged me to seek her out for participation. Thus, there is indication of connected individuals; and as prescribed by the framework, there is evidence of a social structure on which knowledge is developed and shared.
In addition to faculty connecting in the hallways to share knowledge, there is a mentor program at Riverside that has a primary purpose of linking people together. While initially seeming programmatic, more formal in nature, the participants reveal the mentor program to be highly informal.

Pattern two: The mentor program. The faculty, many years ago, of Riverside Community College established a mentor program to assist new members with getting acclimated to the environment. Mentors were assigned to new (full and part time) faculty to help guide them in using, for example the student information system where class rosters are found, grade are entered and other administrative-type functions are performed. The mentors also help new faculty in developing syllabi that adheres to the standards of Riverside (includes appropriate disclaimer verbiage, has information about office hours, contact information, etc.). Primarily though, the mentor is there for the new faculty member to answer questions and, generally, serve as an available knowledge resource.

Seemingly, another purpose of the mentor program is to connect faculty to the social environment of the College - perhaps ensuring these connections are established. Of the five participants that referenced the mentor program, each testified to its value for them. Moreover, the value that surfaced most often from the participants is that by participating in the program, they got connected to knowledgeable resources of Riverside - knowledgeable resources that could be used as needed. For example, Tom, when he began his career at Riverside as an adjunct (Tom was first an adjunct at Riverside, then was hired as a full-time instructor several years later) not only got connected to his mentor, he was able to connect with others that helped him get established at the College. Specifically, Tom said:
I was assigned a department mentor when I was an adjunct, and she was great. I met with her regularly. She would pass along handouts she used for courses. She would give me advice. And, there were a couple of other people in the department that were not assigned to me officially, but took an interest in my career. [They] would meet with me and would sit down and discuss different approaches - different things that would work for them… I use those relationships to this day.

When I asked Tom if the relationship with the mentors was formalized (I asked if there was criteria that governed the program), he indicated, from his perspective, while he initially perceived some formality, it quickly became informal. Tom said, in term of the interactions with his mentor, significant value was derived from the ad hoc outreach to that individual and others. Nick has a similar perspective of the program. He too said the value of the program is sourced in connecting people, and letting them do whatever necessary to learn about the nuances of becoming a community college instructor. Specifically, when I asked Nick about how he learned the ways in which things worked at Riverside, he referred to his mentor. Nick said:

I learned from other instructors. I was very lucky when I joined the College, I was assigned a mentor. That mentor sat in my lectures and provided me with feedback. That was probably the best learning I had. And not only did she sit in on my lectures, I sat in on several of hers – and I have taken a lot of her ideas. I think you are lacking that creativity at the beginning. You don't see how you can do things… You make lots of mistakes. I have participated in lectures with other faculty as well [Nick pauses] you ask questions.

Nick not only talks about receiving practical knowledge through his mentor, but he gives too. The concept of reciprocity (where those who exchange knowledge become trusted sources
of knowledge) comes again to the forefront, and may establish Nick as a valued member of the faculty network at Riverside (Rios-Aguilar, 2010). Nick is still using the resources, still connecting to the network today - he said: "Gaining additional knowledge - I am still doing that right now. I am still engaging in learning outside and inside the college as well."

Marcia is another that seems to enjoy the interactions mentorship creates. When asked about her experiences with having responsibility for mentees, she said: "...what I like about it, we create a dialog – my current mentee has emailed me three times since I observed her class. She asks: what do you think of this? What if I tweak this? Kind of like these ideas." Marcia also reaches out to adjuncts to serve as a resource. She said: "I am always mentoring and talking to adjuncts, they don’t know. And what if they have no teaching experience." In a follow-up conversation with Marcia, she indicated these experiences were an important part of what she knows about being a community college instructor.

The informal sources of knowledge seem essential to the participants. In fact, nine of the ten who participated in this study referred to some form of ad hoc dialog with trusted sources as a resource for developing essential knowledge. According to Andrews and Yee (2006), funds of knowledge is very often developed organically in, what they refer to as, a dynamic environment. They argue our (highly contextual) world is constantly changing, so, in order to survive, we must constantly explore, develop and refine our essential knowledge. It is the contextualized, dynamic, nature of funds of knowledge that "underscores the essentially personalized quality of funds of knowledge" (Hogg, 2011, p. 670). The contextualized nature of funds of knowledge indicates development occurs out of individual experiences. For the faculty of Riverside, these experiences are further explored in the next pattern.
**Pattern three: Learning by doing.** The previous patterns reveal the development of essential knowledge is facilitated in a variety of ways - many of which are through the everyday experiences of being a community college instructor. This pattern reveals that another of these learning experiences is when faculty are, simply, doing their jobs. While it may be argued this is not really an informal source of knowledge, I argue this is faculty learning by doing - learning through the acts of instructing students in the unique social and academic contexts. Moreover, this source of knowledge is not planned learning, not organized learning, it is learning that arises out of the dynamic environment in which people are situated (Andrews & Yee, 2006). The environment is constantly changing, so must the people who are in it. For faculty at Riverside Community College, the technology is changing, the curriculum is changing, the students are changing, and much of this change is embedded in the core activities of instructing students. Where better to learn than by doing?

The classroom-based learning source is brought forth by Nick when asked about the ways in which he learned to be an instructor; when asked how he learned about what to do and what not to do as a faculty member at Riverside. He said he felt like initially he was failing as an instructor: "I think the first year or two, I was a horrible teacher. I just demanded so much. I explained things in one way, the way that I envisioned. I did not really account for other domains of learning." However, with spending time in the classroom, Nick began to get a sense of what would work. Nick said:

Then I started adapting and learning [in the classroom]; but it was simply through making all of these mistakes. I mean if I had not made those mistakes, I would not have [made the changes I did]. I would not have realized my deficiencies in terms of teaching. You can get the most prestigious degree in the world, but having the degree does not mean
you can do the job [that you can teach]. It is through making mistakes [in the classroom]… It is through listening to students.

For Nick, it is out of the classroom experiences that learning occurs and knowledge accrues. It is in the classroom that Nick develops ideas and puts them into practice; sometimes they don't work, and sometimes they do. It is also a process that includes his peers, as Nick acknowledged the importance of engaging his peers in developing corrective actions to what he deemed as mistakes. He was able to talk about perceived mistakes with people whom he believes to be trusted sources of knowledge. Nick said: "I learned from [talking to] other instructors."

Significant in this revelation by Nick is that he brings his experiences out of the isolated world of the classroom and shares them with trusted sources: his peers. He is apparently adept at using and therefore strengthening his internal network.

The classroom is also an essential learning environment for Emma. She said she learned to teach by teaching; teaching in diverse settings. Specifically, Emma, when asked about sources of developing essential knowledge said:

There is my experience teaching at the college level. For example I taught as an adjunct…I taught at a lot of different schools. Universities. Smaller liberal arts colleges. A Christian college. Very different community colleges. I taught Black History at [a college with a high enrollment of African American students], which was a very interesting experience. I was not the anticipated teacher at that time. From those experiences I developed a way of engaging in education that was more hands-on and less traditional – to sort of come with that perspective into the practice of teaching at the college level. I began from a different place so my interactions were of a different nature, to start with.
Emma argues her, perhaps non-traditional, experiences have led to non-traditional ideas about how to teach and she has used those ideas in developing her practice. Moreover, when asked about interactions with peers, Emma also acknowledged that the social environment of Riverside was an important facilitator in the learning process. Emma too acknowledged the value of asking someone for ideas about something that happened in the classroom. Tom also described an essential part of learning in the classroom - he said: "It was very much a learn as I go process." He also acknowledged bringing the experiences out of the classroom to his peers, as he said:

I mean when something does not work it is obvious it does not work and then you can go back and study it, revise it. But sometimes there are more subtle things that you are doing that you do not realize you are doing – so it is good to get that feedback.

Marcia brings a different perspective to the role of the classroom in developing essential knowledge. She, when I asked her about learning to teach, initially said: "It is trial and error [in the classroom]". She then went on to assert that she learned a lot about how to teach by learning what not to do. She learned about what not to do in the classrooms as an undergraduate student. Marcia said:

[I learned from] what I hated about teachers I had when I was in college - the ones that made me the most bored and the most miserable. I thought what? I became an English teacher because an English teacher I had, I knew for sure she wasn’t doing it right, I got into an argument with her and I walked out and I thought I know I can do this better. That is why I became an English teacher - because I was a science major [Marcia laughs].

Marcia developed funds of knowledge through negative experiences. She developed perceptions about what would work in teaching through her experiences of what, from her
perspective, did not. Nonetheless, Marcia has developed definite ideas about teaching out her classroom experiences - both as a teacher and as a student.

The faculty participants of this study, through this pattern, revealed the experiences associated with teaching students is an important source of knowledge. They also offered that engaging with one another, when perhaps things did not go as expected, was an important source of development and support. The participants said using the knowledge of others was an essential approach to building on their funds of knowledge. This experience, inside and outside of the classroom, becomes a means of surviving and thriving for the participants of this study.

Chapter Summary

The funds of knowledge framework indicates that people tend to form, contextually oriented, knowledge-sharing networks (Moll, 2000). These networks, through the distribution of socially developed knowledge, facilitate the development of shared ways of thinking. Indeed scholarly studies using the framework have found normative ways of thinking and knowing organically form and tend to persist within tightly connected communities.

The findings of this study include evidence of common ways of thinking about the essential knowledge needed be a community college instructor. Moreover, students are very much at the center of these common ideas. The themes arising out of the narratives of the participants includes, as it relates to perceptions of essential knowledge, faculty needing to connect with students in order to know more about who they are and what they bring to the educational setting. The themes also provide ideas about who tends to succeed in college and who tends not to succeed. From the perspective of the sources of essential knowledge, there is evidence of formal ways in which knowledge is developed and shared. These more formal sources include knowledge sharing in organized forums as well as in structured programs of professional
development. There is also evidence of knowledge development in informal settings, such as impromptu conversations, through mentorship or through classroom experiences. Chapter six provides a synthesis of the findings for each research question; I also discuss the implications for practice and theory, address the limitations, and provide recommendations for future research.
Chapter 6

Analysis of Findings, Implications and Conclusions

This study explores community college faculty perceptions and ideas of essential knowledge needed to be an instructor, and the ways in which their knowledge includes the student. The first chapter introduced the issue that influenced this investigation – the increasing inequities in higher education, which led to the research problem, that there is a lack of focus in the extant literature on the practitioner’s role in student success. There is a lack of understanding the ways in which practitioners, including faculty, influence student experiences in college. Chapter Two presented the pertinent literature, including the conceptual framework used for the study – the funds of knowledge framework. The research methods were provided in Chapter Three, and Chapter Four presents the context where my study was conducted. Chapter Five summarizes the major themes and patterns that emerged out of the voices and observations of the participants – the nine educators of Riverside Community College. This final chapter presents an analysis of the themes and patterns and intends to clarify the findings of Chapter Five by returning to the research questions of Chapter One. First, the key finding is presented, followed by an interpretation of each finding. In the interpretation, I attempt to relate the finding to the context in which the study was conducted. Then, intersections of the finding to the literature are presented. After the findings and related interpretations and intersections, comes implications for practices, recommendations for future research and concluding thoughts.

Research Question One: Essential Knowledge of Faculty

This section of the chapter intends to address research question one of the study. This is the question of essential knowledge of community college faculty. Specifically, the question is:

What are community college faculty perceptions and ideas of essential practice-related
knowledge and in what ways is the student included? This section provides the results of the analysis and synthesis of the themes and patterns of chapter five. The section provides the findings that emerged out of the voices of the participants. The first finding reveals a contraction in the participant’s ideas of essential knowledge.

(Dis)connecting with students: Exposing the paradox of faculty essential knowledge.

The themes and patterns that emerged out of the narratives of the participants reveals that while their ideas and perceptions of essential knowledge includes the ability to establish meaningful relationships with students, the ability to engage with students, there seems to be a distinct inability to do so. The participants of my study seem to be saying that faculty have to have the ability to connect, but they won’t have the ability to connect. In advocating for ability to connect with students, the participants of my study nearly unanimously spoke of the need to early establish rapport with students by, for example, engaging them in informal dialog. They spoke about faculty needing to learn who their students are, what they bring the classroom. Simply, many of them talked about talking with their students. Moreover, there is some evidence of the participants having an approach that seeks to learn about their students. For example, Marcia talked about the food assignment and learning about squirrel boy. Steve talked about allowing students to bring their interests to the classroom. However, while there is evidence of effort to connect, there is little indication of then using that knowledge to advance instructional practices. There seemed to be little attention given to engaging with the student to explore and make meaning out of the stories – to juxtapose the student’s world into the classroom. There was little indication of pedagogical change from the exposure to students. In other words, the attempts to engage and keep it real with students seemed somewhat superficial. Perhaps the students also sensed superficiality in the approach, which led to a state of connection failure.
The indication of connection disconnect began to surface in the participant’s broad, generic, descriptions of their students. They seemed to know that community college students are very much non-traditional students that they are working, have families and are otherwise highly engaged outside the campus environment. They have a lot going on. However, knowledge of the non-traditional nature of their students seems to closely align with well-documented knowledge of the non-traditional nature of the community college student (Bean & Metzner, 1995; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Moreover, the narratives reveal assumptions about the students—a way of thinking that suggests a perception of knowing the reality of others, but not really knowing it. Adrienne spoke about the cell phone student and assumed he was not focused on education. Others also spoke in ways that projected assumptions of connection failure. They talked about asking students to come see them, but knew they wouldn’t. They talked about directing students to campus services, but knew many would not go. They talked about attempting to foster interaction via the systems of the College, but knew it would not always happen. The faculty participants of this study seemed to be saying that our ways of thinking about engaging students in order to provide a positive environment does not really work for many of our students. From my perspective, the participants seemed to be acknowledging current instructional practices are not working—they know it, but they don’t know what to do about it.

Additionally, and to the focus of this study, the narratives reveal generic ways of thinking about certain students. There are, embedded in the voices of the participants, some very candid assumptions revealed when talking about underrepresented students. For example, Kimberly said, “minority students don’t know how to hustle”; and Steve said of the students of his reading and writing developmental education classes that he knows many will struggle, and, when
referring to the struggling students, that: “those are the students who generally just kind of disappear.” Janice said students from certain areas are likely to struggle. Moreover, for Steve, Janice and for all of the participants, as indicated by them and by enrollment patterns and by administration, they are likely to have significant enrollments of underrepresented students, so, the connections that fail and the ways of thinking about students are often in reference to students who most need the support. Next, I explore my interpretations of the conditions that may be causing the failure.

**Conditions that create a failure to connect.** The espousal of essential knowledge by the participants, by those who instruct significant groups of underrepresented students, distinctly includes the ability to engage with students – the ability to know their students. However, the connection between faculty and students tends to be problematic – the participants offer many examples of failed connections with their students. They offer examples of an inability to connect. A key question becomes: why the contradiction? Why is it that the participant’s perceptions of essential knowledge include the capability to connect, while also indicating that they often don’t have the ability to do so? Analysis of the narratives of the participants as well as information from the College’s information repositories reveals possible sources.

There are structural conditions at Riverside Community College that perhaps make it difficult for faculty to know their students – to have more meaningful knowledge of their students, which was often espoused when asked about essential knowledge. For example, several of the participants conveyed that, for a given semester, their rosters could include more than 200 students; especially in the developmental classes. Steve indicated that it was typical for him to start the term with more than 200 students. Adrienne and Marcia specifically stated that it was not unusual to have hundreds of students for which they are responsible to instruct. Enrollment
review of several area community colleges indicates that this is not unusual, especially for instructors of developmental education and gateway classes, many of which are in high demand by community college students (Bahr, 2010). The result is that instructors of these classes can have large enrollments of students. From my perspective, while faculty essential knowledge may include ability to develop meaningful knowledge of their students, it would seem very challenging to do so for instructors like Steve, Adrienne, Kimberly and others. For example, a faculty member with 200 students perhaps needing an hour or two per semester (at minimum) with each student in order to more effectively engage with them would expend hundreds of hours on this activity alone. Perhaps the large class sizes, in some ways, create the connection challenge.

Another possible structural condition creating challenge for faculty at Riverside is systems that, while intended to provide support to the students, could tend to reduce direct communication with students. For example, as I learned by attending a faculty professional development session, Riverside uses an early alert system. The system is intended to provide faculty with a tool to alert appropriate college staff that a particular student is having problems that are affecting academic performance. The faculty member essentially uses a computerized system to alert someone, perhaps a counselor, that his or her help is needed with a student. The person receiving the call for help reaches out to the student. However, as Nick pointed out, the process does not contain provision to ensure the student actually receives help. The faculty member essentially presses the help button in the system, and that’s it. He or she may or may not ever talk to the student; nor may the student ever talk to anyone, if he or she chooses not to do so. Many community colleges in the state are using a similar system, and feedback from peer administrators indicates it really does create a mechanism for a busy faculty member to generate
a call for support for the student, but it also can mean the faculty member does not actually have
to talk to the student; perhaps thereby eliminating an opportunity for interaction and for
connecting with the student. The same could be said for tutoring services of the College. While
these services provide an avenue of focused support for reading, writing, math and other
subjects, they could create the ability for faculty to divert students. Perhaps these types of
services are contributors to the connection gap.

Institutional change could be another possible source of the connection challenge. The
participants described, in addition to the early alert system, the introduction of technological
systems that seem to have ability to divert their ability to connect with students. For example,
Adrienne talked about Blackboard, a course management system (see Definition of Terms in
chapter one), and that it provided an electronic means of delivering information to students. She
also described scenarios where class time was devoted to using Blackboard, where the students
were learning to use the system. She talked about students who missed assignments because they
did not use the computer. Nick talked about using the course management system for
communicating with students because, essentially, it was the best way to simultaneously contact
a lot of students, and it was a good way to make information readily available to the students.
Perhaps the use of electronic systems to communicate with students reduces the personal contact
(as Nick implied). Instead of personally communicating with the student, the instructor can use
electronic means of doing so. Also, according to my college’s department of instructional
support, it can take up to 78 hour to setup and maintain a course in the Blackboard system, which
is not inconsequential; perhaps taking faculty time that could be spent with students.

Finally, institutional policy tendencies could be a factor of the connection contradiction.
From an institutional perspective, Riverside Community College has outcome standards for each
class, according to the participants, that includes specific academic capabilities that each student must demonstrate. For example, there are writing standards for developmental English, Rhetoric, and other such classes. Therefore, faculty are guided to follow a rather narrowly focused pathway of curricular development and educational delivery – ways that do not seem to include the use of multicultural education (Banks, 2007).

**Connections to the literature.** The funds of knowledge literature suggests that educators tend not to have strong, thick, connections with students. The well-developed scholarship on the framework essentially asserts that teachers, instructors, and other educators, develop the essential knowledge to perform meaningful activities, like teaching, by interacting with peers, by reading professional journals, articles and other resources related to teaching and learning (for example, Bensimon, 2007; Gonzalez, 2005; Hogg, 2011; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). In other words, the majority of the interactions in developing essential knowledge are done within the educational context and by connecting with peer educators – not with students. Educators rarely engage with students in developing their essential knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez), thus, and as this study has found, there is little evidence of pervasive and persistent connections between faculty and students. Significantly, faculty-student engagement that locates responsibility on the student to engage seems to be problematic. Whereas an approach of practitioner initiated connections could create opportunities in developing funds of knowledge that would benefit students, especially those who have often been on the margins of higher education. This idea is explored in next.

It seems the faculty participants of this study are functioning in a paradigm that is not effective for all of their students – which may be a source of the failure to connect. The participants of this study speak about students engaging into the college environment as an
essential element of funds of knowledge. Whether it is advising they (faculty) are available for students to come see them, or providing them with information about campus services that are available for their use, or, from the College, advertisement on the website of the extracurricular activities that are available to the student, there seems to be a concerted effort to get students to engage with the campus community. These are activities associated with the paradigm that positions academic success as a function of individual assimilation into the social and academic structures of the college. This is the approach that tends to take a monolithic view of the student body, focusing on the individual’s experiences in, and ability to engage with, the college environment. The level of student engagement tends to influence commitment and therefore persistence to completion (Bensimon, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000; Stage & Hubbard, 2007). The student becomes largely responsible for integration and therefore, as my findings indicate, practitioners tend to locate responsibility for student success on the student. However, and as my findings also suggest, when the institution and its people don’t really account for all students as they develop the structures, the practices and the policies that comprise the environment, when the ways of thinking and knowing that makes up the social structures of the college creates negative experiences some students, it is unlikely these students will ever connect (or engage). The student engagement paradigm does not seem to account for students on the periphery; it seems to leave underrepresented students like many of those at Riverside on the margins of higher education. It seems to create the conditions for failure in the connection needed to be successful.

Conversely, there is evidence that when the campus provides an environment that proactively supports underrepresented students to engage, they are able to do so (Rendon, 1994, 2002). It is when members of the campus community initiate engagement with students in ways
that conveys they are valued and respected that meaningful connections can occur. It is when interactions with students, all students, by practitioners that create feelings of self-worth that success can occur.

Lastly, the literature on culturally responsive teaching practices indicates that when teachers have culturally relevant knowledge of their students, and they integrate appropriate content, viewpoints and experiences into the curriculum, all students’ learning experiences significantly increase (Banks, 2007; Nieto, 2007). However, the current curriculum, as suggested in my findings, is “organized around concepts, paradigms, and events that reflect the experiences of mainstream Americans” (Banks, 2007, p. 247). Moreover, and as with my findings, there is evidence of some progress, however, curricular and pedagogical change is slow in coming as there is little evidence of consistent integration of culturally relevant practices into the primary processes of the college (Banks 1996, 2004, 2007; Nieto, 2007).

**Hope is not enough: outcome assumptions in faculty essential knowledge.** The second finding extends on the ideas of the previous finding. These findings, along with presentation of data in chapter five, starkly reveal the extent to which the essential knowledge of the participants includes the student. This finding reveals that faculty knowledge may include conceptualizations of students that locate the students in places of advantage, and in places of disadvantage. The conceptualizations of students include ideas about engagement and performance that are based on perceptions of behaviors and characteristics of the students. For some students, including underrepresented students, these conceptualizations of the student can include ideas of inability to affectively participate in the educational context. These conceptualizations essentially represent predispositions by the participants of their students – ideas about the student that have formulated out of the local context and seem to be held as valid and seem to be utilized as the
participants engage in the routine practices of the position. These predispositions represent essential knowledge that includes the prospect of assumptions about who will succeed and who will fail in their classroom.

The conceptualizations of community college students by faculty includes ideas that not all students come to college ready or perhaps able to participate. Many of the participants of this study expressed perception that their students come from places that render them unprepared for college. There is assertion of ideas that the high schools are not always sufficiently readying the students who end up in their classroom. For some, like Janice, the perception is the high schools of lower income communities are particularly unsuccessful in preparation. For others, like Kimberly, the perception is the students come from families that are not necessarily focused on college. These are the students who come to college hoping to succeed, but not really believing they will. They have hope, but little more. Mom and dad are happy if they make it, however, they are not necessarily expecting them to do so. These are background characteristics of students that contribute to the conceptualizations of the participants. There are also behavioral characteristics that arise. For example, there are ideas of the participants that some students don't really know how to act in college; they don’t know how to respond to faculty in ways that they can be taken seriously. For Steve, there is the perception the lack of response by some students seems to be an indication of unwillingness to participate – students that are not really serious about college. Additionally, there are more generic ideas; for example, students have too many outside distractions – they are working, they have families. They don’t have time for college. These are ways of thinking about students that relegates them to a less-than-ideal state – they seem to indicate that students arrive at the community college with inherent deficiencies. They seem to locate the responsibility for what happens at the college largely on the student.
The potential sources of predisposed ideas of students. There are many factors that could be potential sources of essential knowledge that includes predispositions of students by faculty. From the narratives, two particular seem to stand out: the social environment, and structural conditions of the college. Also, each of the factors is consistent with the literature on the ways in which thinking about things can be influenced.

At Riverside Community College, the social environment seems to facilitate the ideas of student for faculty. First, from the voices of the participants, and from several observations, there are pervasive and consistent ideas about the student. When talking about essential knowledge and the students, almost all of the participants provided ideas about those that would succeed and those that would not. They described those that knew how to act, those that didn't. They described those that were ready and those that weren’t. They described those that hustled and those that hoped. It is, as described in the funds of knowledge literature, very likely that consistent ideas about students will source out of the social environment and norms will be developed. It seems likely that at Riverside, given the uniform views of student by all, the participants are connected to an environment that is a productive entity for developing and disseminating knowledge. The strength of the social environment will be further explored the finding that addresses research question two; however, suffice it to indicate that there is evidence the social structure of the College is a reliable facilitator of knowledge.

The structural conditions of the College also are a potential source of conceived ideas about students. First, there are policies in place at Riverside that may facilitate positive and negative ways of thinking about students. For example, Riverside implemented a policy that allows faculty to dismiss students who miss some number of classes. The stated logic for policy is research that indicates students who miss a given number of classes are more likely to struggle in
the classroom. Many of the participants made reference to the policy at one point or another. Moreover, the policy of dismissing students for absences is referenced in almost every syllabus received from the participants – indicating wide-spread knowledge and use of the policy. From my perspective, it is possible this policy causes faculty to think about students in different ways. Perhaps it sets the expectation for faculty that they will have students to dismiss from the class. Several of the participants indicated using the policy liberally. Another structural condition could be the approach of having developmental classes. Frattura and Capper (2007) argue that developmental-type classes, in secondary education, promote deficit ways of thinking about students. Essentially, developmental education casts certain students as deficient – a notion that then permeates the institution. Perhaps developmental education is an influence on the ways of thinking of the institutions of higher education as well. The next section explores the connections of this finding to the literature.

**Connections to the literature.** The funds of knowledge framework indicates that the social environment is likely to be comprised of a community of like-minded people who learn from each other (Hogg, 2011). The environment can be rather inward facing, where the knowledge to perform essential activities is developed and shared within the confines of the social system. Therefore, it is out of the system that normative ways of thinking and knowing occurs (Gonzalez, 2005). Moreover, the funds of knowledge scholarship contains rich evidence of educators thinking about students in certain ways – having certain ideas about students, including underrepresented students (for example, see Andrews & Yee, 2006; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Indeed the like-minded educators of a given social system tend to construct ideas about students that include notions about student performance in the classroom. These ideas are often based on characteristics, behaviors, and other factors. It is also likely that these ideas are shaped such that
student outcome challenges are the responsibility of the student (Bensimon, 2007). Moreover, as included in the findings of my study, they are shaped to include preconceived ideas about who will succeed and who will not.

The literature focused on student success provides rich demonstration that students are more likely to thrive in a positive educational environment (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010). The environment includes institutional policies and practices as well as the classroom and faculty. From the perspective of influence a positive approach by instructor can have on the student, Umback and Wawrzynski (2005) assert “faculty behaviors and attitudes affect students profoundly, which suggests that faculty members play the single most significant role in student learning” (p. 112). When the student feels supported and valued, when they feel that they have to the ability to make a positive contribution in the classroom, their educational experiences tend to be more valuable. Conversely, students tend not do well when they perceive that members of the campus environment do not value them (Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin & Castro, 2010). Underrepresented students especially can be sensitive to disrespect and indications of an environment that is not welcoming. They tend to disengage in these conditions. Moreover, underrepresented students are often misunderstood by faculty – faculty can lack essential knowledge about them, which creates communication gaps and other challenges (Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin & Castro). Indeed the finding of my study that faculty may develop preconceptions about students, including underrepresented students, suggests an environment that may not create a welcoming atmosphere for all students. This seems to be especially true for students who come to the campus with ways of thinking and knowing that do not align with the norms of the environment – those that do not align with the expectations of the good student.
Research Question Two: Sources of Faculty Knowledge

This section of the chapter intends to address research question two of the study. This is the question of knowledge sources. Specifically, the question is: What are the influences and experiences of community college faculty as they acquire their funds of knowledge? This section presents the finding that emerged out of the analysis and synthesis of the themes and patterns of chapter five. The finding that indicates the likelihood that faculty essential knowledge originates out of the internal context of the College.

Knowledge development is contextual. This finding reveals essential knowledge for the participants seems to be largely developed in the local context of the College. The participants, in learning how to be an instructor at Riverside Community College, often turn to internal sources of information and support. Emerging out of the dialog of the participants is the instructor coming to the College for the first time, and having questions about where to go, what to do, and how to do it. The sources of support, sources of knowledge, can be found within the institution that is the College. The participants each seemed to find a rather well developed network of people with common goals, common ways of thinking and knowing; held together by systems and structures that facilitate knowledge sharing. The ways of learning at Riverside Community College include routine, scheduled, forums for faculty to engage in sharing ideas – they include formal sources of knowledge. The formal sources of knowledge development and sharing include faculty-only department meetings. The participants each described these as useful sources of knowledge, where they could engage with peers in the process of learning about the learning process; where they could engage in attempting to solve the many challenges that seem to be a part of the job of instructor. The formal sources also include faculty-led professional development programs, which are orchestrated by College administration and
provide the opportunity for faculty to convene and share information on a particular subject. The professional development programs also seem to be an opportunity for faculty to develop shared ways of thinking. The programs provided essential knowledge on instructional approach, using the systems of the College, and bring current scholarship to the participants.

Informal sources also seem to be an important means of knowledge development and sharing at Riverside. Many of the participants spoke of the comfort of being able to engage with peers as needed. There seems to be an appreciation of peer knowledge, and that there is a willingness to share it. The enthusiasm was very discernable from almost every one of the participants as the spoke about their peers – these were people that held each other in high regard and were very willing to call themselves an active participant of the knowledge network. There was not one individual who express negativity about the community of teaching professionals; the sense of pride of holding membership was transparent.

One source of evidence of the strength of the faculty network is found in syllabi provided by faculty for this study. The documents indicated consistencies in practice. For example, course policies, which included information on attendance (and that students would be dismissed for missing a certain number of classes), grading, class participant and other aspects. The syllabi also contained consistent information on course schedule, expected behaviors and communication procedures (how and when to reach out to the instructor). The syllabi provided support to this finding that knowledge seems to be contextually developed, and that there are common approaches to essential practices.

**Interpretation of the local development of essential knowledge.** This section attempts to surface and briefly explore possible factors that facilitate the internally focused development of knowledge at Riverside, The faculty of Riverside, as seen through the lens of the participants,
seem to have a strong network of trusted sources of knowledge. The network seems to be comprised of people who engage with one another on a consistent basis. From my perspective, one factor of the development of the strong network could be related to the logistics and the facilities of the College. The faculty of the College share office space in relatively small quarters. There are two people in each office that seemed no larger than a rather large clothes closet. Moreover, the offices are clustered together in common areas to form the department quarters. Most typical, as it is the case with the English department, is an enclosed section of a building with a single door to gain entrance. Within the section are these small offices. On my first visit to Riverside, I must admit that I was somewhat surprised by faculty’s quarters, as in my experiences full-time faculty have more private and somewhat more spacious offices. However, the closed physical nature of the Riverside faculty space also seems to positively facilitate dialog amongst the faculty. I witnessed on many occasions faculty talking in these small spaces. During one early interview in a faculty office, it became very difficult to concentrate as the voices from ongoing conversations were coming from all directions. I had to get acclimated to an environment that at first seemed extremely noisy. It was thereafter that it occurred the noise represented ongoing conversations amongst instructors. It also occurred to me later that the office spaces of the College perhaps served to facilitate communication; perhaps they served to bring people together. Perhaps these tightly clustered office spaces facilitate the assembly of people in support of a knowledge network.

Another possible factor of Riverside that may contribute to a strong network of people who engage in learning has to do with the environment of the College. More specifically, it may have to do with an environment that affords continuous opportunity for people to engage. The participants of this study each spoke, when asked where they learned about teaching, about
opportunities to meet and talk about their successes and their failures. They spoke about the faculty forums, the professional development sessions, and the meetings with administration. They spoke in common ways that seemed to indicate there are established and trusted forms of learning about the role of community college teacher. They spoke in common ways that seemed to indicate familiarity with the environment and with the people. Moreover, in my experience in the professional setting, it is out of familiarity, created by environmental conditions, that people tend to turn routinely for support. The environment creates a place of wellbeing, which incents people to engage in times of challenge. When I need help, I look for the familiar – I look for something I recognize and can use to resolve my work-related problems. Often, this entails looking to those who surround me. It seems to me that, when occupation-related questions arise, people often turn to those who know most about the occupation – those who surround them in the work environment. There are several intriguing intersections between this finding of internally developed knowledge and the literature. These will be explored next.

**Connections to the literature.** A principal idea that arises out of the funds of knowledge framework is that essential, practical, knowledge is formed in the context of people who share common goals, common needs, and are often bound by geography, culture and other factors (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Velez-Ibanez, 1988; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Communities of people in desert regions develop practical knowledge that has very specific objectives – they work together in often extreme conditions. People tend to find confidence in ways of knowing and doing out of contexts that are familiar – even if the familiar includes extreme conditions. The same is thought to be true for educators. Educators are often most comfortable in contexts that are familiar – the educational environment most principally (Moll, 2005). Educators tend to find comfort in their own space, and therefore the environment is an
important factor in their development of essential knowledge. They look for things they have seen before, things that make sense (Moll, 2005). From my study, the participants, educators, also seem to find comfort in the familiar. There is evidence of a tendency to interact in familiar spaces with familiar people – speaking with people in ways that make sense and developing common ways of thinking. There is trust that likely comes in some respects out of positive reinforcement from the interactions with peers. This study adds support to the literature with the finding that the educators who participated in this study tended to consider the internal social environment of the college a trusted source of knowledge. There is evidence arising out of this study that educator essential knowledge tends to develop in the context of the college.

Another way in which this study adds to the scholarship is that is provides support for the dominant paradigm, which asserts that ways of viewing the student do not really include the unique experiences of the student (Bensimon, 2007). The student is more likely to be viewed by faculty in common ways, and through a knowledge lens that is internally developed. The student, in the dominant paradigm, is depicted “as an autonomous and self-motivated actor who exerts effort in behaviors that exemplify commitment, engagement, self-regulation, and goal-orientation” (Bensimon, 2007, p. 447). The findings of my study indeed indicate that faculty can tend to develop essential knowledge within the local context and they can tend to develop monolithic views of students.

From a success scholarship perspective, previous research indicates that students, especially underrepresented students, are unlikely to complete their educational goals where there is little accommodation for the unique experiences and backgrounds they bring to the campus (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). The result is a campus that is often hostile to underrepresented students, as practitioners lack the knowledge and ability to create an environment that is both accepting
and utilizes the strengths of underrepresented students. They lack the ability to use the unique experiences of all students to strengthen their instructional practices. The findings of this study includes faculty development of essential knowledge is likely to internally source (not use the student), and, ideas of the student tend to be preconceived. The preconceptions include predetermined ideas of student outcomes. The confluence of these findings creates implications on the success challenges for underrepresented students that need to be considered.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study indicate that while faculty may espouse ability to meaningfully connect with students, there is evidence of inability to do so, which may foster common ways of thinking about students. There is rich evidence in the scholarship of benefit to bringing the students experiences into the classroom. There is evidence of benefit of faculty having ability to engage with students in order to learn about, and integrate into educational practices, the cultural experiences they bring to the educational setting. The findings of this study, again, indicate inabilities and conditions that prevent the connection. Educators should consider actions, perhaps in the form of policy and procedure change, that promote faculty ability to meaningfully engage with students. There should be consideration for actions that allow routine interactions between faculty and students. From an institutional perspective, there should be well-defined establishment of best practices that includes the prescribed, perhaps less-formal, interactions between faculty and students. The college could allocate staff and other resources whose primary purpose is to facilitate interaction. An example of approaches to accomplish the interaction includes planned activities the put faculty and students together in some place other than the classroom. The activities could include breakfast sessions, where the college provides facilities and food. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt (2010) assert that programs that promote intentional
faculty-student interaction, often in less formal settings, is a factor in creating an environment of inclusion and establishing relationships that create forums of knowledge sharing – and is a key ingredient in creating the conditions for success. The institution needs to establish ways of pulling students into the college environment through insistently continuous outreach by faculty, counselors and staff. Too often, the student is expected to be the initiator of interaction with the campus environment, and this approach is simply not working.

Another institutional approach to promoting interactions with students on their terms includes changing the ways in which faculty performance is evaluated. It seems the evaluation is often based on a student feedback form on the last day of class, attending profession development, and other internally oriented factors. Changing the performance evaluation standard to include externally oriented interactions with students would likely encourage this behavior. Perhaps the performance evaluations include a measure of engagement with students. Perhaps this capability becomes a stronger component of faculty essential knowledge through expansion of the faculty’s community of resources that are used in the development of funds of knowledge.

The final institutional recommendation derives from the finding of this study that faculty are likely to lose visibility of the student as they are engaging the support services of the College. The process of Riverside Community College entails advising the student that they should consider going to tutoring (for example). However, faculty may or may not know that the student engages with the support service, and they seem not to know much about what is occurring with the student in the act of engaging with the service. As Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes and O’Brien (2007) found, there is benefit when the student feels that someone is supporting them in engaging with the people and the processes of a college. This is especially true with the
underrepresented student who can feel confused and frustrated when interacting with the educational environment. It would seem beneficial to develop ways of enabling faculty to stay connected with the student when support services of the college are engaged. It would also seem to be beneficial that faculty are knowledgeable of the services themselves. One way of doing so would be to change the process, to where the faculty member is more actively engaged with getting the student help. Instead of the current passive approach, there could be time allocated for faculty to proactively meet with students and support staff (e.g. tutors). Perhaps once or twice a week there is a time considered student-faculty-support staff meeting-time. This would become the community-of-support time for students. The potential benefits include faculty essential knowledge enhancement in several ways. First the faculty has higher levels of interaction with the student, therefore having the opportunity to learn more about the student, and perhaps enhance their practices out of these interactions. Second, faculty essential knowledge is enhanced through greater exposure to the college’s services – thereby learning more about the ways in which the college is supporting the student and potentially using this knowledge in instructional processes. This approach may also expand the faculty’s network, which currently seems to be very much localized, very faculty centric, to include students.

From a state policy perspective, there is a tendency for legislators to support accountability standards in higher education that can introduce prescriptions of outcome requirements (Dougherty & Hong, 2006). One implication is that institutions, in order to receive state funding would be required to produce students who successfully pass classes and complete programs of study. As one of the participants essentially said (in the context of state-required outcomes): if we get to the point where the legislators say that students have to get A’s, guess what? They are all getting A’s. It becomes difficult to situate the development of culturally relevant practices
that include more thoughtfully engaging students in the context of state policy environment that includes performance accountability standards. Therefore, I recommend a shift in focus from performance-based accountability standards to one where investment is made by the state to incent and reward institutions that are able to develop approaches that create equitable outcomes for all students. In Connecticut, there is currently a bill in the state legislation to eliminate developmental education programs at the community college, because they are not working. Perhaps instead of an approach that tends to cast students as deficient and locates them into a prescribed program intended to remediate, there should be an approach that facilitates the ability for skilled educators to directly engage with students and use these engagements to inform educational practices.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While the findings of this study provide valuable insight on faculty essential knowledge, further examination is needed in several areas. First, this study was conducted with participants who are full-time faculty. However, approximately two-thirds of the instructors responsible for teaching in the community college classrooms are part-time. These are the adjunct instructors of the community college responsible for the learning experiences of a significant population of students. Moreover, studies reveal a potential negative impact on student outcomes with part-time instructors (Jacoby, 2006). Therefore, conducting a study using the approach of this study with adjunct faculty would produce the ability to determine consistencies and differences in the perceptions and sources of essential knowledge of these unique faculty types, and perhaps reveal new understanding on the phenomenon of student success.

Second, the faculty participants of this study provided ideas about the influences of the college environment on the student and on their practices. There is likely to be value in knowing
more about community college faculty’s interactions with the structural environment of the college, and their perceptions of the influence the environment has on their essential knowledge. For example, this study revealed that Riverside Community College environment includes policies that allow the student to be dismissed from class when certain behaviors occur. We also learned that the environment includes the use of technology in the classroom and in many other processes of the college of which the student must utilize. There could be value in learning more about faculty perceptions and ideas about the influence of the environment on their practices and on student learning. There could be value learning more about the influence of the environment on faculty funds of knowledge. Perhaps those that are most likely to interact with students, faculty, have stories to tell that would help us learn more about environmental influences on their funds of knowledge and therefore on students. As with the present study, the recommended study should be conducted at a community college that serves diverse groups of students in order to include the experiences of those that have influence on all students.

Third, more needs to be known about the funds of knowledge of other practitioners – non-faculty members of the campus. There would be value in learning more about the perceptions and ideas of essential knowledge of staff that are directly involved in servicing the student, as well as those indirectly involved. For example, there is likely value in knowing more about the perceptions of essential knowledge of admissions counselors and enrollment staff, and how it includes the student. There is likely value in learning more about the people who come into contact with the student on a daily basis – people who do influence the student’s experiences with the college. Perhaps from a study of this nature, we would learn more about policies and processes of a community college and the ways in which they influence the student’s experience.
Perhaps there are ways in which the findings of this type of study would help us to positively influence the ways in which we engage with our students.

Lastly, although the unit of analysis for this study was faculty years of experience, this aspect did not reveal significant differences in ways of thinking amongst faculty participants with different years of experience. There were not significant differences in ways of thinking between those who have more experience and those with less experience. A study using similar approach to this one, while using a different unit of analysis, could yield important findings. For example, a study that uses ethnicity as the unit of analysis may reveal differences in ways of thinking about essential knowledge and differences in experiences in interacting with the social environment of the college, that further inform what is known about the influences of faculty on the student. Moreover, this study, in considering the aspect of faculty experience as a distinctive characteristic of the participants, did not account for prior experience of the faculty participants. Perhaps there are prior teaching experiences of the faculty participants that influenced their ways of thinking, their perceptions of essential funds of knowledge, which were not surfaced in this study. A study that accounts for prior experiences of community college faculty may provide valuable insight; in terms of findings from this study, perhaps accounting for prior experience may provide insight on the socially constructed norms of community college faculty.

Conclusions

Inequity in higher education is an ongoing challenge as underrepresented students continue to obtain valuable credentials at disproportionately lower rates than White students. While much effort has been applied to the equity challenge, the scholarship mostly focuses on the student, and not the educators. In fact, little is known about the practitioner and their role in the educational experience for students – including underrepresented students. This study was
conducted in order to answer the call to expand the scholarship on student success and take into account the influence of practitioners and the ways in which their knowledge shapes the practices intended to support students, all students, in achieving their educational goals. The practitioner of the higher education who most often interacts with the student in the academic environment is the faculty serving in the role of instructor (Levin, Kater & Wagoner, 2006), and the college that is a primary source of access to higher education is the community college (Bragg, 2001). Therefore, this study was conducted to explore faculty perceptions and ideas of essential knowledge needed to be a community college instructor, and to explore the ways in which they acquire their (funds of) knowledge.

The findings of this study, which attempt to contribute to the scholarship on the equity challenge, suggests that faculty essential knowledge includes contradictory elements of the ability to engage students and the inability to do so, which may, in some ways, lead to preconceived ideas about students that locates students in places of advantage and disadvantage. The seemingly superficial view of students, arising out of inability to connect, creates a somewhat dichotomous view of student. The participants tend to speak about students in ways that juxtaposes characteristics and experiences onto a binary outlook of ability to succeed, or not. This, given the consistency of the responses, seems to be cultural norm of the social environment. In some respects, the findings of this study suggest community college faculty are hoping that all of their students will have positive learning experiences, but they are not expecting. There is an underlying tone of…we are going to try really hard, but, it is going to be really hard for some students. There is a sense that emanates from an environment of high hopes and low expectations.
Evidence from the participants of this study supports the funds of knowledge literature that essential knowledge of practitioners tends to be developed in a local context (Andrews & Yee, 2006; Bensimon, 2007; Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Hogg, 2011; Moll, 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez, 1992; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Findings from this study support the idea that practical knowledge of educators is developed through everyday interactions with the college environment. The participants of this study unanimously referenced aspects of the college environment when describing how and where they acquired the essential knowledge needed to perform the role of instructor.

This study adds support to the literature that practitioners tend to take a monolithic view of students – that essential knowledge is likely to include the idea that students should be motivated to engage with the social and academic environments of the college as the pursue their educational goals (Bensimon, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo, Nora, 2000). Practitioner essential knowledge tends to include the idea that positive educational experiences are a function of student ability to look and act like the ideal of student, which includes the ability to assimilate into the college environment. The participants of this study provide evidence that indeed there are prescribed ways of thinking about students that include perceptions of students that tend to complete their educational objectives, and those that do not.

In summary, nine participants of Riverside Community College generously provide their time and it is much appreciated. The voices presented in this study help to illuminate that there is much work to be done in the equity challenge. However, there is the prospect of progress, as much time and resource is being applied to the learning more about underrepresented student experiences in the community college by foundations like the Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and others. This study, within the context of a very limited scope, hopefully
contributes to the efforts. Perhaps more importantly, the voices of the participants provide ideas for the way forward, a way forward that includes advancement towards equitable educational practices and enriched educational experiences for students – all students.
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Appendix A

Faculty Recruitment Letter

Dear Riverside Community College Faculty Member:

I appreciate your interest in my research. I am currently a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Lorenzo Baber in the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and my dissertation study investigates the influence of faculty on underrepresented (African American and Hispanic) student success.

I have included in this email the consent form which provides additional information regarding the study, including the risks and benefits of the research.

As described in the consent, I will need approximately 60 minutes of your time for an interview. There may be a need for follow-up meetings in order for me to clarify or augment your responses. This follow-up's are expected to take no more than 30 minutes, and every effort will be made to keep them brief in order to minimize your expended time on this project.

Additionally, I would like to attend one or two meetings of your class in order to observe, and, I would like to review your course syllabus. You are free to decline to participate in either of these aspects of the study.

I will share the transcript from the interview with you upon completion. At that time, you will have the opportunity to identify any errors in the transcription.

If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email; and print and sign the attached consent document and I will arrange a time to pick it up.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me (call collect) at 630-715-7073 (babb1@illinois.edu), or, Lorenzo Baber at (collect) 217-333-1576 (ldbaber@illinois.edu).

This project has been reviewed by the University of Illinois’ Bureau for Educational Research (217-333-3023). If you have any questions about research subject’s rights, please contact Anne Robertson at the University of Illinois’ Bureau for Educational Research by telephone (call collect) at 217-333-3023 or email at arobrtsn@uiuc.edu.

I thank you most sincerely for your participation in this study.

Michael Babb
Doctoral Candidate, University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign
Office Phone: (847) 925-6825 - Email: babb1@illinois.edu
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Research Question 1 (rq1): What are community college faculty perceptions and ideas of essential practice-related knowledge (funds of knowledge) and in what ways is the student included?

Research Question 2 (rq2): What are the influences and experiences of community college faculty as they acquire their funds of knowledge?

(Research questions are referenced in Group 2 and Group 3 questions)

Group 1 of Interview Questions – warming up…getting to know…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Purpose…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about yourself</td>
<td>Learn about the person, their background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long have you been a community college instructor?</td>
<td>Learn about the person’s professional entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompt (if necessary): How did you come to be an instructor?</td>
<td>into the community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you come to be at Riverside College?</td>
<td>What attracted them, or required them, to be at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Riverside?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on next page)
Group 2 of Interview Questions – which go towards gathering data on what community college faculty know about instructing students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>rq1*</th>
<th>rq2*</th>
<th>Connection to Funds of Knowledge conceptual framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does one need to know to be an instructor at this college? (or, what is the essential knowledge a community college instructor must have?)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Funds of knowledge (FK) relates to essential practice-related knowledge – the knowledge needed to effectively participate in a given social environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you find are the most effective approaches/practices for instructing students at this college?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Participants of the social structure develop competencies (real or perceived)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In terms of instructing students, are there ideas about how things should be done at this college? A certain way of carrying out the role of instructor?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>The social structure may tend to create norms for a community of people – common ways of knowing and doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about your students. [Prompt if needed: tell me about their backgrounds.] [Prompt if needed: in what ways do your students come with different experiences] [Prompt if needed: Tell me about your students of color – what experiences and capabilities do they bring to the classroom?]</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>In what ways does community college FK relate to students? Are there thick or thin relationships between faculty and student? Is there a dominant paradigm (e.g. an artifact that includes the “statue” of the ideal student)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are ways in which you are able to use student’s experiences in your practice?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>FK research (in secondary education) indicates that teachers who integrate student experiences into their teaching creates robust learning experiences for students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See research questions at the beginning of this section.

(Continued on next page)
Group 3 interview questions – which go towards gathering data on how community college faculty come to know about instructing students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>rq1*</th>
<th>rq2*</th>
<th>Connection to Funds of Knowledge conceptual framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did you learn to be a community college instructor?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FK indicates that knowledge is socially constructed – in what ways is this the case, if at all, at the community college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In terms of instructing students, how did you learn about how things are done at this college?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In a social structure, members tend to conform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there groups or people that help a new faculty member? People that network and exchange ideas? Who are they and how do ideas get exchanged?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FK often involves a thick social structure – is there one at this college?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See research questions at the beginning of this section.

Group 4 interview question – closing out...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Purpose…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything else you’d like to share with me about being a community college instructor?</td>
<td>Provide the participant with the opportunity to share anything that I may have missed…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank the person for their time…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Funds of Knowledge Environment of Riverside Community College

Social Environment of the College
- Campus Community: Administrators, Staff
- Organization Policies, Processes, Structure (e.g., Student Readiness, Tutoring, Center for Faculty Development)
- Cultural and Professional Norms

Faculty
Funds of Knowledge Development:
- Professional Forums (department meetings, conferences, training)
- Mentorship
- Informal Interactions and Opportunities
- Cultural and Professional Norms

Funds of Knowledge Content:

Know The Students
- Connect with them
- Provide relevant pedagogy
- They lead complex lives

Know Who Will Succeed
- They know how to act
- They work hard

Know Those Who Will Struggle
- They are not supposed to be here
- They don’t get it
- They will drift off

Students
Diverse Experiences, Cultures, Ways of Knowing and Doing