

Summer 7-2015

Writing on the Margins: Student Experiences in a Learning Support English Course

Tabatha W. Martin

Kennesaw State University, tabathamartin905@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mapw_etd



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Martin, Tabatha W., "Writing on the Margins: Student Experiences in a Learning Support English Course" (2015). *Master of Arts in Professional Writing Capstones*. 9.

https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mapw_etd/9

This Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the Professional Writing at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in Professional Writing Capstones by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Writing on the Margins: Student Experiences in a Learning Support English
Course

By

Tabatha W. Martin

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Professional Writing in the Department of English

In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State
University

Kennesaw, Georgia

2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As my journey toward completing a master's degree comes to a close, I have so many special people to thank for helping me along the way. I want to thank the faculty and staff of the MAPW program for opening my eyes to the world of composition studies and for inspiring me to be a better writer and teacher. I also want to thank my fellow TAs for being the best group of people I could have ever had the fortune of teaching alongside. They inspired me every day in innumerable ways and made me a better teacher for it. Thank you to Doctor Beth Daniell, whose research methods class was instrumental in getting my capstone project off the ground. Thank you to my capstone committee members, Doctors Mary Lou Odom and Todd Harper, for their guidance and support in the completion of my capstone project. Most important, thank you for always believing in me and for giving me the confidence to succeed. A special thank you goes to Milya Maxfield for helping me find my voice again as a writer and for making me get out of my own way.

I also want to thank my family—my great-grandmother, Nanny, for being our family's lighthouse in the storm; my parents, Charles and Rachelle, for their continued love and support; and my sisters, Terri and Traci, for their special bond and for all of their encouragement. Though we did not have much, our house was always filled with books, and many nights were spent curled in bed while Mom read from one of them. My literacy narrative begins with her. Thank you to my wonderful husband Brian for holding

my feet to the fire. I could not have done this without you, and I love you to the moon and back.

In closing, I want to thank Doctor Barry Munday and Elizabeth Dechert of Chattahoochee Technical College for giving me the opportunity to teach all those years ago. They helped unlock a passion from within that I never knew existed. Thank you for believing in me. And last, I want to thank the students I have had the privilege of teaching all these years, whose stories of persistence and courage under fire made this capstone possible. I hope that in completing this project I have lent a voice to those most deserving of being heard and that I have reminded the world that educational opportunities should exist for all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
History of Basic Writing Programs	3
Mina Shaughnessy and the Term “Basic Writing”	5
Basic Writing Through the Years	5
CHAPTER 2: STUDIES AND SUCCESSES IN BASIC WRITING: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	9
CHAPTER 3: A MODEL FOR ASSESSMENT OF A BASIC WRITING PROGRAM: METHODOLOGY	17
Institutional Context	17
Learning Support English	18
Data Collection Methods	19
Sampling Procedures and Sample Size	22
Participant Characteristics	24
CHAPTER 4: A PICTURE OF SUCCESS: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	28
Grades Data	28
The Survey	30
Paper Questionnaires	30
Follow-up Interviews	34
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	39
Implications for Further Research	42
English 0098 Redesign	43
Epilogue	44
REFERENCES	46
Appendix A: Paper Questionnaire	49
Appendix B: Student Interview Questions	52
Curriculum Vitae	54

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My work as a teacher of basic writing began in the winter of 2008. At 23, barely out of college myself, I was given the opportunity to teach “learning support” classes at a nearby technical college. I had no idea what these classes involved other than that they had been explained as “refresher” courses aimed at preparing students for college-level coursework. I would teach, among other courses, learning support English, or basic writing. I was intrigued by the opportunity even though I hadn’t given teaching much thought as far as a career option. I was just glad to have a job right out of school, so I accepted. Armed with little more than an English degree, the course textbook, and the course syllabus, I set out to teach my first class.

I can’t say that I was too “shocked” at the writing I saw in that first batch of essays. I was told, after all, that these students struggled with writing and grammar—that’s why they were in learning support. Their essays, while demonstrating a general understanding of the writing process and basic essay structure, in some cases lacked development and reflected obvious deficiencies in the application of English grammar. I was, however, taken aback by the students themselves. I was not much older than (and in some cases, just as old as) the individuals who sat before me, yet we had obviously lived very different lives and taken very different paths to get to this point.

Or had we? The more I got to know my students, whether through each essay they composed or through conversations before and after class, I came to realize that we had a

lot more in common than I thought. I, like some of my students, came from limited means (which is just a nice way of saying I grew up poor), and I, like most of my students, was the first in my family to go to college. Much like many of my students, I didn't come from a family of scholars. Life was tough, but I was determined, and I worked hard. Fortunately for me, I also had support systems in my family, close friends, teachers, and academic advisors. I think that was the point at which my experiences diverged from those of my students. In spite of adversity, I had support systems in place to help me through high school and college whereas my students (not all but many) lacked such systems. And so, with a sort of "pay it forward" philosophy, I made it my mission as their teacher to give these students whatever I could to help them pass their learning support classes and become proficient college writers, increasing their chances for college success.

With each term I set out to revamp my course so that it was better than the time before. I poured over books in our school's resource center on student success, study skills, writing and grammar, and reading comprehension for inspiration for writing assignments, class activities, and projects. The course text was my life raft. Each term began with excitement and hope as I was eager to try out a new course structure or a new essay assignment. I saw myself coming into my own as a teacher and owning my work. As my students' confidence grew, so did mine.

As years went on, I saw dozens of students successfully complete learning support English and move on to first-year composition. I would occasionally run into some of my former students on campus; I'd ask them how things were going in their classes. They would generally say that English was hard but that they were getting

through it. I would remind them that they could always reach out to me if they needed help; some did. I was also a tutor at the college, so students would come by for feedback on their essays. Beyond these fleeting interactions, however, I never really knew what happened to my students after they passed my class. I assumed the learning support English classes at my campus were effective because of the number of students I witnessed pass them; however, aside from anecdotal evidence, I didn't have any information to validate this assumption. And so grew my interest in basic writing pedagogy.

In 2012, I embarked on a study to answer three questions: At what rates do students pass learning support English and first-year composition? How do students perceive learning support English in terms of its effectiveness in preparing them for first-year composition? To what factors do students attribute their success in first-year composition and beyond? It was important for me to understand not only how effective the learning support English classes were in terms of retention but also in terms of their pedagogical frameworks. In other words, were we teachers of learning support English doing our jobs? Before I could delve into this study, I needed to know the history of these classes and the lives surrounding them.

History of Basic Writing Programs

While remedial or developmental education programs have existed in American colleges since as early as the 1860s, it was not until the 1970s that basic writing was established as a subfield of composition studies. Basic writers are characterized as entering college students whose writing skills indicate the need for additional preparatory coursework before enrolling in college-level English courses. These writers make up a

very diverse population of students consisting of non-native English speakers, adult learners, students who did not perform well academically in high school, students who are the first generation in their families to attend college, and others. Cross' (1980) description of developmental students, including basic writers, included the following traits: lack of proper study skills, low motivation, "sociocultural factors relating to deprived family and school backgrounds," and low self-esteem, although Cross acknowledged that not all of these traits apply to all basic writers (as cited in Kasden, p. 2). Further, these students typically complete at least one basic writing course prior to enrolling in first-year composition. Additionally, they must demonstrate a degree of mastery of the skills taught throughout their basic writing coursework by satisfying a basic skills exit test.

Basic Writing programs as we know them today began as a response to the open admissions policies of the late 1960s. Faced with political pressures in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, public colleges sought to reduce their minimum admissions requirements, thus opening their doors to all students, especially veterans, who might wish to pursue a college education. Composition faculty, however, were not prepared for the student body that would emerge as a result of these policies. Students they had never taught before were now sitting in their classrooms—students who appeared, by most standards, incapable of writing. Without any prior experience teaching remedial writers, teachers were at a critical crossroad. In time, as college faculty and administration adjusted to the needs of these students, an interest in defining basic writers and identifying those teaching practices best suited for them emerged, resulting in our earliest basic writing courses.

Mina Shaughnessy and the Term “Basic Writing”

Through her prolific texts of the 1970s, including “Basic Writing” (1976) and the groundbreaking *Errors and Expectations* (1977), composition professor and scholar Mina Shaughnessy was instrumental in garnering national support for the term “basic writing” as well as in establishing basic writing as a subfield of composition studies. Prior to open admissions, the terms “remedial” or “developmental” had been used to characterize the writing of remedial students (Troyka, 1987, p. 3). Samples of student writing from Shaughnessy’s experiences as an English instructor at the City University of New York (CUNY) in the late 1960s and early 1970s became the study on which *Errors* is based. This text helped establish a framework for teaching underprepared college writers and for negotiating error in the basic writing classroom. Her book is divided into several sections, each highlighting an error in either mechanics or usage common to the basic writer, along with strategies for recognizing and addressing each. Shaughnessy believed that such writing was not the result of students’ lack of awareness of writing conventions but of inexperience applying them. *Errors* was one of the first texts of its kind to address the writing processes of remedial writers and to provide helpful pedagogical guidelines to instructors of basic writing.

Basic Writing Through the Years

The 1970s was marked by a heightened interest in the composing processes of not only basic writers but also of composition students in general. Perl’s (1980) study on the composing processes of basic writers revealed that basic writers employ many of the same writing processes and strategies as more experienced writers but with less proficiency. The issue, as echoed in *Errors*, is one of fluency. Sommers’ (1980) study

comparing the composing processes of student writers versus more experienced adult writers argued that basic writers employ many of the same revisionary processes as more skilled writers but that the issue, again, was revealed to be one of fluency of application. The work of Flower and Hayes (1980) revealed that writers actually follow a recursive process of composing, shifting the way composition teachers and scholars had viewed the writing process. Through understanding the ways in which basic writers composed, it was believed that teachers of composition could teach basic writers more effectively.

The 1980s was marked by much of the same attention to the composing processes of basic writers but with an emphasis on the social contexts in which students composed as well as on the cognitive process of composing. The eighties reflected a continued desire to understand the basic writer and to align pedagogical practices appropriately. This decade also saw the rumblings of standardized assessment as a means of identifying and understanding the basic writer. Further, this decade saw a rise in basic writing teachers' guides—most all of them from CUNY faculty. The Conference on Basic Writing was founded as a means to provide basic writing teachers with a greater sense of inclusion in the field of composition studies, and the *Journal of Basic Writing*, once a publication based out of CUNY, became a national academic journal (Otte & Mlynarczyk, 2010). Adding to the scholarship in composition studies was Bartholomae's (1985) essay on novice college writers, which revealed that in attempting to situate their writing within the context of academic discourse, students create illogical, confusing prose. The eighties was a time of exploration that continued to establish the field of basic writing.

The 1990s to the present have seen the rise in demand for accountability in all of developmental education, as developmental studies programs across the country have faced substantial cuts as a result of the education reform policies of the nineties. These programs have all but been confined to the two-year college. Additionally, certain U.S. states are prevented from offering remedial coursework in four-year colleges and universities (Levin & Calcagno, 2008, p. 184). One explanation behind the cuts is that remediating students in two-year colleges is much less expensive than at four-year colleges and universities (Levin & Calcagno, 2008, p. 184). A study by Brenemen and Harlow revealed that remediation costs U.S. public colleges between one and two billion dollars per year (as cited in Levin & Calcagno, 2008, p. 182). Akst and Hecht state, “In an age of shrinking budgets and growing demands for accountability, the [...] need for evaluation is particularly acute in college remedial programs” (as cited in Hodges, 1998, p. 58). With such pressures placed on remedial education programs, ensuring that students succeed as a result of being placed in them is vital.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the learning support English program at Chattahoochee Technical College—a multi-campus, two-year, public technical college in North Central Georgia—at preparing its students for first-year composition. Through an examination of one of the college’s eight campuses, this study examines the rates at which students pass English 0098, the upper-level learning support English course, and English 1101: Composition and Rhetoric. Further, by investigating the classroom experiences of former learning support English students, this study highlights practices, activities, and resources students find most helpful in preparing for English 1101. This study presents a comprehensive localized assessment model, drawing from the

perspectives of some of developmental education's greatest stakeholders—the students themselves. The combination of these findings contributes to the larger body of knowledge concerning basic writing pedagogy as well as the field of composition studies as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

STUDIES AND SUCCESSES IN BASIC WRITING: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Following the 1970s and 1980s, decades marked primarily by a desire to understand the basic writer in part through studies focused on those writers' composing processes, the 1990s was marked by yet another distinct period within the field of basic writing. This decade ushered in the call for empirical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of developmental education programs—including basic writing—spurred by educational reforms.

Boylan and Bonham's (1992) study was one of the first to answer the call. Acknowledging (at that time) an obvious void in the field, the authors set out to investigate the effectiveness of developmental education programs through a comprehensive, nationwide study analyzing student transcripts from 150 institutions—including two-year technical and community colleges, four-year public and private colleges, and four-year research universities.

Schools were selected at random, and students from two-year colleges were tracked for three and a half years while students at four-year colleges and universities were tracked for five and a half years. Data compiled from student transcripts—also randomly selected—revealed that overall, while developmental students' grades generally lagged behind those of non-developmental students, persistence and graduation rates among the majority of this population paralleled the national average quite closely. Additionally, the study revealed that more than three quarters of those students who

earned grades of C or better in their developmental courses also earned grades of C or better in their college-level equivalents.

Data gathered from this study indicated that the developmental programs sampled were successful in their efforts to help underprepared students succeed in college. Their study is rich with data in support of the claim that developmental education programs lead to greater student retention. Boylan and Bonham successfully answered the call for studies on developmental education while laying the groundwork for future studies. While their study explored developmental education in general, Adams' (1993) study focused on basic writing programs in particular.

Adams' study, while focused specifically on basic writing, is similar in scope to Boylan and Bonham's in that it also explored student retention and employed a similar methodology. Faced with the possible elimination of one of two levels of basic writing courses at Essex Community College, coupled with his own desire to know the outcomes for those students who had completed basic writing at Essex, Adams examined student retention rates over a two-year period to determine how the program performed overall.

Adams' study examined the retention rates of students who tested into both the lower- and upper-level basic writing course compared to those of students who tested directly into freshman English, focusing primarily on the lower level of the two courses. Of those students assessed, those who tested into the upper-level basic writing course passed freshman English at three times the rate of those students placed in the lower-level basic writing course. This figure is disappointing; however, the study revealed that those students who managed to complete both basic writing courses were better prepared for and experienced better outcomes in freshman English than those students who only

completed one course out of the sequence. Of the 41 lower-level basic writing students who ultimately took the course, 31 (76 percent) passed (Adams, 1993, p. 31).

Adams' study was more narrowly focused than Boylan and Bonham's, as he tracked students from only one institution; however, tracking the students for multiple years, as did Boylan and Bonham, allowed for greater data collection. Similarly to Boylan and Bonham, Adams collected data through analysis of student transcripts, the results of which were entered into a centralized database. While Adams' was a much smaller study, the results obtained still spoke strongly to the positive impact of developmental education on students who might not otherwise have completed college studies. He also argued for more empirical studies on the success of basic writing programs.

As articles on the effectiveness of developmental studies, particularly basic writing, began to emerge, so too did articles on the importance of assessment and placement in developmental studies. White's (1995) article and Hodges' (1998) study similarly addressed student success and retention in developmental studies but focused primarily on the benefits of assessment and placement in identifying those students in need of remediation in the first place. White and Hodges separately argued that by implementing a proper assessment tool, coupled with the proper instruction, students who might otherwise not obtain a college degree are positioned for better outcomes. White, like Adams, focused on basic writing while Hodges, like Boylan and Bonham, focused on developmental education in general.

White asserted that without more empirical studies to represent the rate of success of students in basic writing, such programs would continue to face the backlash of

looming budget cuts, as scholars, faculty (specifically the New Abolitionists, those against the first-year composition requirement), and administrators would further seek to do away with basic writing and the first-year composition requirement altogether (1995, p. 76). White challenged the claim that evidence supporting the effectiveness of basic writing programs was not accessible through his discussion of the results of two separate studies. The first study, conducted out of California, concluded that students who completed a basic writing course persisted at a greater rate than those who did not and at a rate slightly higher than the average for all students. The second study, conducted out of New Jersey, concluded that students who completed remediation persisted at a rate of only 5 percent less than those who did not (1995, p. 81).

White reviewed the results of the abovementioned studies in his defense of basic writing programs across the country. He also called upon others to provide evidence of their own in order to see these programs continue. White acknowledged that while no two assessment measures are equal, and while some remedial programs are not as effective as others, the California and New Jersey studies provided compelling evidence that much can be done to help low-scoring students be successful in college. While White's article highlighted the results of two broader studies, Hodges' study explored the role of placement and assessment at one particular school. She also drew from White's and Boylan and Bonham's studies in support of her own.

Hodges' study was prompted by the Student Affairs office at Chattahoochee Technical Institute (now Chattahoochee Technical College) in 1996, two years after the institution of the Assessment of Skills for Successful Entry and Transfer (ASSET), a multi-section, timed exam used for placement and support and to mitigate the school's

high attrition rate. Administrators wanted to know whether the ASSET was actually helping students through its assessment of their level of college readiness and identification of those students needing extra help, as more and more students were being placed into developmental courses based on scores achieved.

Hodges' study revealed that of those students placed into the upper-level developmental English course during the 1995 academic year, more than half passed the course (1998, p.61). Subsequently, about half of those students also passed their first-year composition course (Hodges, 1998, p. 61). Similar to the results of the Boylan and Bonham study, 61-70 percent of the students who placed into developmental studies courses (including reading and mathematics) passed those courses as well as their college-level equivalents albeit with lower grades than students who tested directly into the college-level courses (Hodges, 1998, p. 60). Hodges' study affirmed "that developmental students are successful in subsequent regular level courses" (1998, p. 62). As in the previous articles described, she encouraged others to participate in similar studies and to continue adding to the body of literature regarding the effectiveness of developmental studies.

Hodges' study was of a smaller scale than those reviewed in White's article in that hers was conducted at one school while the studies in White's article examined multiple schools. Hodges compared grades earned in developmental studies courses to those earned in subsequent college-level courses whereas the studies in White's article examined longer-term retention, not including the grades earned in college-level equivalents necessarily. All three studies, however, validated the role of assessment,

placement, and support in helping underprepared college students succeed, speaking to the larger role of developmental studies.

In addition to articles on the benefits of assessment and placement in developmental studies, articles detailing the assessment of the developmental courses themselves began to enter the field. Focused specifically on the assessment of a basic writing course are Wolcott's (1996) and Sweigart's (1996) articles, which both explored potential models for assessment.

Wolcott discussed a basic writing program evaluation implemented at her college that uses various assessment tools—pre-post multiple-choice tests, pre-post essays, and portfolios—to measure student gains. Along with these assessments, students and teachers complete questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of the program and to determine possible changes to the curriculum or other aspects of the program. Wolcott sought to provide a balance of quantitative and qualitative data in the evaluation of the basic writing program at her college and to present a possible assessment scheme for other institutions.

Students in Wolcott's program complete a pre-essay and pre-multiple-choice test for placement purposes. At the end of the semester, students complete a post-essay and post-multiple-choice test, which are then used to determine whether students are ready for college-level English. These 50-minute, timed, impromptu essays are graded holistically. Students also submit a portfolio at the end of the semester for determination of their final grade.

At the end of each term, a sample of portfolios is gathered from each classroom and scored holistically to evaluate the overall program. Wolcott acknowledged that while

each form of assessment has its limitations, when taken together, multiple assessments provide a comprehensive evaluation of students' writing and reveal where improvements can be made to the program.

Sweigart also examined the limitations of individual assessment schemes, notably multiple-choice testing, in his proposal of a model for assessment relying on holistically scored essays to evaluate student gains. Sweigart's model for assessment of a developmental writing program was based out of Indiana University Southeast, a commuter school that, at the time this assessment was developed, consisted primarily of recent high school graduates, adult learners, and non-native English speakers. Like those described in Adams' study, students are placed in one of two levels of developmental English based on a placement essay. Instructors of all levels in the program, who have received training on how to properly rank the essays using criteria developed by Sweigart, score these essays holistically. Students then complete a similar essay at the end of the semester to assess their level of writing improvement. The assessment showed gains over the course of the year. Sweigart also presented a call to action for others to develop localized assessment schemes to fight external forces.

Both Wolcott and Sweigart explored the idea of the best model for assessment while acknowledging the inherent limitations of individual assessment schemes. Wolcott presented a more comprehensive means of assessment whose individual parts, when taken together, present a more holistic overview of a basic writing program. Sweigart looked at the benefits of using holistically scored essays versus multiple-choice tests to assess student achievement in a basic writing course. Wolcott's model also considered

student perspectives, providing a more personal, qualitative feature to the rest of the more quantitative study whereas Sweigart's study relied on more quantitative data.

As these studies show, developmental studies programs, in particular basic writing programs, are generally effective in helping underprepared students achieve collegiate success. But as more and more of these programs become phased out to be relegated to the two-year college arena, it will become even more imperative for institutions to perform localized assessments of their own to demonstrate their accountability for the continued success of these programs. And the fact remains that as long as the standards defining the "typical" college student continue to evolve, more and more students will need the kind of support provided by developmental studies programs. It will also be just as important to investigate the pedagogical frameworks behind these programs as it will be to investigate their results. This study presents one model for assessing a basic writing program that not only examines grades data but that also reveals students' perceptions of their own success.

CHAPTER 3

A MODEL FOR ASSESSMENT OF A BASIC WRITING PROGRAM:

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was threefold: Examine the rates at which students pass English 0098, the upper-level learning support English course, and English 1101, their subsequent first-year composition course. Identify those classroom practices, activities, and resources students find most helpful in preparing for first-year composition. Evaluate students' overall impression of the learning support English program at the Mountain View campus of Chattahoochee Technical College (CTC).

Institutional Context

Chattahoochee Technical College, a member of the Technical College System of Georgia, is the state's largest technical college, with eight campuses spanning six counties in North Central Georgia (Chattahoochee Technical College, 2012). The college is under the accreditation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and offers Associate of Applied Science degrees, diplomas, and technical certificates of credit (Chattahoochee Technical College, 2012). The mission of CTC is to help students "successfully achieve academic and career goals while advancing workforce and economic development" (Chattahoochee Technical College, 2012).

All CTC applicants are granted entry into the college provided they are at least sixteen years old, have obtained a high school diploma or equivalent, and have earned satisfactory scores on one of several college entrance exams. Prospective students

without valid test scores must complete the Computerized Adaptive Placement Assessment and Support System (COMPASS) test in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics before enrolling in any classes. This untimed, computerized test is used to assess students' preparedness for college-level coursework. The test is computer adaptive, meaning the level of difficulty of each question is determined by whether the student answers the previous question correctly. At the point at which the questions "level out," a score is generated, which is used to determine the student's level of proficiency in that particular subject area. Students whose scores reflect the need for additional preparatory coursework in either reading comprehension, writing, or mathematics are enrolled in one or more of the college's learning support, or developmental studies, classes. These courses do not confer college credit and do not transfer to other institutions; however, they do count toward students' eligibility for financial aid.

Learning Support English

Similarly to the programs described in Adams' study and in Sweigart's assessment model, the learning support English program at CTC consists of a lower- and upper-level course. Students identified as needing basic writing coursework are placed into either course depending on their scores on the Writing Skills portion of the COMPASS test. English 0097, the lower-level course, introduces students to basic grammar, the writing process, sentence-level composition, and paragraph writing. Writing assignments consist of simple to complex paragraphs and common business documents. English 0098, the upper-level course, emphasizes the writing process,

composing multiple paragraphs and essays, conducting research and using secondary sources, and proofreading and revising written compositions, among other objectives.

Diploma-level students placed in English 0097 must pass the course with a C or better to enroll in English 1010: Fundamentals of English I. This course satisfies the college English requirement for diploma-seeking students and emphasizes more applied grammar, writing, and communication skills. Degree-level students placed in English 0097 must pass the course with a C or better and enroll in English 0098 prior to enrolling in college English courses. Students who enroll in English 0098 must pass the course with a C or better and earn a score of 65 or higher on the Writing Skills portion of the COMPASS test within two attempts in order to satisfy the learning support English requirement and advance to English 1101: Composition and Rhetoric. Students who do not pass the test must retake English 0098. As most CTC students are degree seeking, and as English 0098 is essentially the “bridge” course between basic writing and first-year composition, it is this course that this study seeks to investigate.

Data Collection Methods

Two methods of data collection were used in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the learning support English program and the students it serves. Final grades data was generated from the school’s BannerWeb system, and a survey consisting of paper questionnaires and personal interviews was administered to former English 0098 students.

The BannerWeb system houses information including student financial aid records and transcripts and grades earned at the end of each term for each course. Individual course rosters can be retrieved by entering the associated academic year and

course identification number. Each roster indicates not only the individual grades earned in the course but also the grades each student enrolled has earned thus far at CTC. To align with the period of time during which all students surveyed and interviewed were enrolled in the course, course rosters dating back four years were evaluated. These rosters reflected each section of English 0098 taught at the Mountain View campus during this period.

The following academic years were evaluated: 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012. Chattahoochee Technical College converted from quarters to semesters in fall 2011; therefore, some years span more courses than others. Also, learning support English was not offered on the Mountain View campus during the summer term. Of those course rosters compiled, each was then analyzed to determine the number of students who completed English 0098 and of those students, the number who enrolled in English 1101 and the number who completed the course. These individual figures were then tallied to determine the overall rate of retention for each academic year evaluated. This methodology aligns especially with that of Boylan and Bonham's study as well as with the studies cited in White's article, which drew from grades data to determine the rates of retention and persistence in developmental education in general and in basic writing in particular. This methodology also expounds on the previous work of Hodges and Kennedy (2004), who also explored retention in developmental studies at CTC.

Data collected for this study also included a survey consisting of paper questionnaires submitted by students in either English 1101 or 1102 who had completed English 0098 prior to enrolling in first-year composition. According to MacNealy (1999),

“Paper questionnaires are a relatively easy and inexpensive way to gather data” and “allow the respondent time to think over answers” before submitting them (p. 149). The questionnaire consisted of two major sections: demographic information and course feedback. The goal of using this instrument was to learn more about the learning support student population of the Mountain View campus and to attempt to establish additional metrics by which to measure students’ perceptions of learning support English.

The section on demographics asked students to indicate the number of terms they had completed at CTC, their program of study, their educational and professional goals, their previous schooling, and their age and gender in order to describe the students sampled. The section on course feedback asked students to indicate on the following scale how strongly they agreed or disagreed that English 0098 had either helped them meet or was currently helping them meet the course objectives of their English 1101 class: strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree, strongly disagree. From there, students were given a list of classroom practices, activities, and resources and asked to rate each on the same scale in terms of its helpfulness in preparation for English 1101. Students were also provided space to write in additional comments of their own and were asked whether they passed the Writing Skills portion of the COMPASS test on their first or second attempt. Lastly, students were given space to provide contact information if they wished to participate in a follow-up interview on their classroom experiences in English 0098 (see Appendix A).

As MacNealy indicates, however, there are also disadvantages to paper questionnaires, in particular, a “limited amount of information that can be elicited because follow-up and clarification questions are not possible, as they would be in a

personal interview” (1999, p. 149); therefore, in addition to paper questionnaires, the survey portion of this study also consisted of follow-up interviews with students who had completed the questionnaires. As with the questionnaire, the interview posed questions related to students’ classroom experiences in English 0098 but with greater breadth than those posed in the questionnaire. Interview questions were crafted to put students at ease, to help students recall the time in which they were enrolled in the course, and to ascertain their general impressions and expectations of the course prior to enrolling versus after completing the course (see Appendix B). The benefits of personal interviews, or person-to-person surveys, include “a richer depth of information” as well as “higher participation rates” and immediate feedback (MacNealy, 1999, p. 150). When taken together, the grades data, paper questionnaires, and personal interviews provided a richer, comprehensive evaluation of the learning support English program at CTC-Mountain View.

Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

This study was conducted during spring semester 2012 at the Mountain View campus of CTC. Mountain View is a smaller, suburban campus located in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The campus is host to four academic programs of study and has a heavily traditional student population consisting of recent high school graduates. Students enrolled in learning support classes at Mountain View consist of both traditional and nontraditional students, the majority being the former. Within this population exist smaller subpopulations of non-native English speakers and students with learning or other disabilities.

In order to participate in the study, students had to be 18 years of age or older and had to have completed English 0098 prior to enrolling in English 1101. Instructors of English 1101 and 1102 were asked to allot a portion of their class time in order to administer the paper questionnaires. Students were informed about the research study at the beginning of class and were asked if they would volunteer a moment of their time in order to complete the questionnaires. Attached to each questionnaire was an informed consent form explaining the exclusion criteria for the study and how the information provided would be used for research purposes only and would be properly protected. Each student was given a paper questionnaire so that students who had completed learning support English did not have to identify themselves. Students were given approximately 15 minutes to fill out the questionnaires. Students removed the informed consent forms before submitting the questionnaires for review. The last page of the questionnaire included a section for students to leave their contact information if they wished to participate in the follow-up interview. Data collected from the questionnaires was then entered into a software program for trending.

From the questionnaires submitted, a sampling of students was identified to participate in the interview. Interviews were scheduled by phone or email and took place either in the classroom before or after class or over the phone for the students' convenience. Again, students participating in the interviews were provided informed consent forms indicating the exclusion criteria for the study and how any information provided would be used and protected.

Five sections of English 1101 and 1102 combined were sampled. From each section sampled, approximately five students were present who had completed English

0098, resulting in a total of 25 questionnaires completed. From those questionnaires completed, five students were interviewed. This is a relatively small sample size; however, Mountain View is a much smaller campus compared to the other seven that make up CTC, and only two sections of English 0098 were offered during most of the academic years comprising the study, a much lower frequency than at other, larger CTC campuses. The sample size was also limited by student attendance on the particular day in which that section was surveyed and by the fact that the study was conducted in the spring, when attendance is typically lower. The grades data complements the smaller sample size, as approximately 250 students took English 0098 between fall semester 2008 and spring semester 2012, a much larger sample size. The results of the questionnaires and interviews, while conducted on a smaller campus, do open a discussion on those classroom practices, activities, and resources to which students most attribute their learning and their successful outcomes in both English 0098 and English 1101.

Participant Characteristics

Based on information obtained from the paper questionnaires, approximately 61 percent of students surveyed had completed three terms or fewer at CTC, and approximately 39 percent of students surveyed were enrolled in the school's technical specialist program. This program is essentially a general studies program, ideal for students who wish to earn transfer credits to a four-year college or university. Regarding educational and professional goals, approximately 13 percent of students surveyed indicated that their educational goals included earning transfer credits. Additionally, approximately 30 percent of students surveyed indicated that they wanted to earn a

college degree and “get a good job” or “live a good life.” With the exception of a few healthcare science, culinary arts, and digital media arts students, descriptions of educational and professional goals were broad.

Further, approximately 87 percent of students surveyed were high school graduates, and approximately 35 percent of students reported that they had completed prior college studies (see Figure 1). Of those students having completed prior college coursework, 50 percent had earned a diploma or degree. Last, approximately 74 percent of students surveyed were aged 18-24 (see Figure 2), and approximately 52 percent of students surveyed were female.

Educational Backgrounds of Students Surveyed

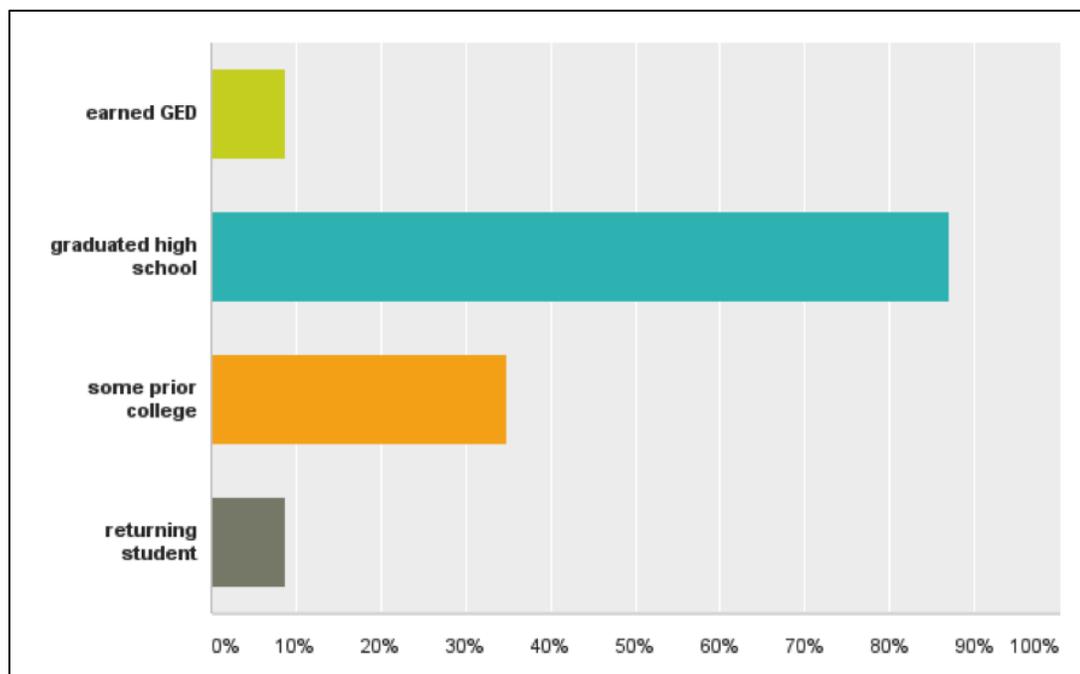


Figure 1. Students’ Educational Background

Ages of Students Surveyed

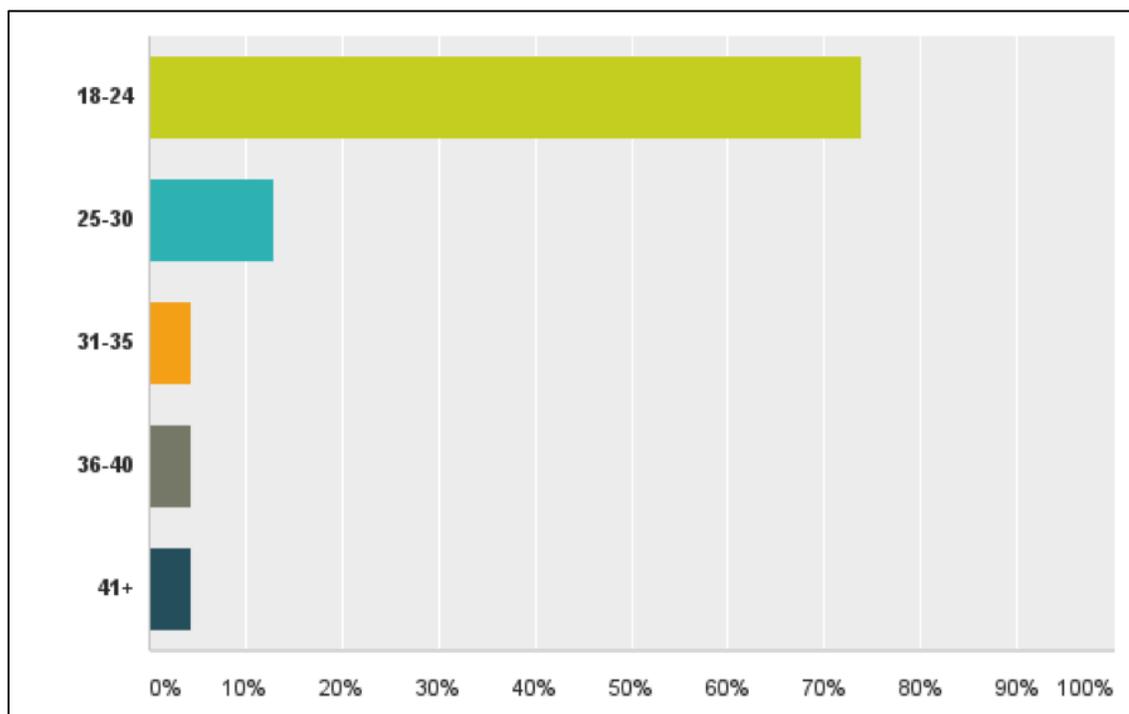


Figure 2. Students' Ages

Based on information obtained from student interviews, typically, students required to complete learning support English were also required to complete one or more other learning support classes, such as reading or mathematics. Depending on their program of study, students completed a sequence of either English 1101 and Speech 1101: Public Speaking, or English 1101 and English 1102: Literature and Composition after the completion of English 0098. Students, while generally not pleased with the prospect of having to complete learning support English, realized its importance and wanted to get as much help as possible to become better writers. "I expected to get all the tools to go onto the next level," reported one student (D. G., personal communication, 2012).

The questionnaires and interviews revealed much about not only the classroom environments in which students achieved success but also the emotional factors contributing to their ability to thrive in their subsequent first-year composition courses. Coupled with the grades data compiled, this study provides a unique look into the lives of learning support English students at CTC-Mountain View.

CHAPTER 4

A PICTURE OF SUCCESS: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using a comprehensive model of assessment including analysis of grades data, paper questionnaires, and revelations from personal interviews, much was revealed about the learning support English program and the students it serves at the Mountain View campus.

Grades Data

While it was important to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the learning support English program directly from the students it serves, it was of equal importance to validate student comments quantitatively through analyzing grades data generated from the school's BannerWeb system. From fall 2008 to spring 2009, 37 students were enrolled in English 0098. Of those students, approximately 84 percent passed the course, and of those students who passed the course, approximately 91 percent went on to pass English 1101. In all, 20 of the original 37 students successfully completed both courses. This is approximately 54 percent of the original total enrolled in English 0098. From fall 2009 to spring 2010, 98 students were enrolled in English 0098. Approximately 70 percent of those students passed the course. Subsequently, about 83 percent of those students passed English 1101. In all, approximately 44 percent of the original 98 students enrolled in English 0098 completed both courses. This figure represents a slight dip compared to the previous year. From fall 2010 to spring 2011, 64 students were enrolled in English 0098; approximately 66 percent of them passed the course. Of those students

who completed the course, about 65 percent passed English 1101. Of the original 64 students enrolled in English 0098, about 31 percent successfully completed both courses—another dip overall.

Accounting for the drop in overall retention is that at around this time, the school enacted a policy by which if a student did not pass the Writing Skills portion of the Computerized Adaptive Placement Assessment and Support System (COMPASS) test within two attempts, he or she received a failing grade in the course. In spite of the overall retention being lower, more than half the students enrolled in either course passed that course.

The rate of overall retention did go up slightly from 2011 to spring 2012. During this academic year, 47 students were enrolled in English 0098. Of those students, roughly 55 percent passed the course, and of that percentage, approximately 89 percent went on to pass English 1101. In all, of the original 47 students, about 36 percent completed both courses (see Table 1). Some students were counted more than once in a given academic year because they had to complete English 0098 multiple times before satisfying the COMPASS requirement and advancing to English 1101. Overall, the data can be interpreted positively in that more than 50 percent of the students enrolled in English 0098 completed the course while more than 50 percent of those students also completed English 1101. This data also aligns well with that gathered from the survey in terms of students' perceptions of their own success.

Table 1

Retention Rates by Academic Year

Academic Year	No. of Students Who Were Enrolled in 0098	No. of Students Who Completed 0098	No. of Students Who Enrolled in 1101	No. of Students Who Completed 1101
Fall 2008-Spring 2009	37	31 (83.7%)	22 (70.9%)	20 (90.9%)
Fall 2009-Spring 2010	98	69 (70.4%)	52 (75.3%)	43 (82.6%)
Fall 2010-Spring 2011	64	42 (65.6%)	31 (73.8%)	20 (64.5%)
Fall 2011-Spring 2012	47	26 (55.3%)	19 (73%)	17 (89.4%)
Total	246	168 (68.2%)	124 (73.8%)	100 (80.6%)

The Survey

In conjunction with the grades data, this study also included a survey consisting of paper questionnaires and follow-up interviews with students who completed them. The goal of the survey was to evaluate students' perceptions of their own success in both English 0098 and English 1101, in light of the grades data obtained, and to explore to whom or what they attributed their ultimate outcomes.

Paper Questionnaires

In evaluating their overall impression of English 0098, more than half the students surveyed (approximately 52 percent) strongly agreed that the course had either helped them or was currently helping them succeed in English 1101, followed by roughly 26 percent who agreed with this statement. Information gathered from the personal interviews highlights this data further. As one student stated, "I had all the confidence in

the world [in English 1101] writing papers—same with [conducting] research” (D. G., personal communication, 2012). In contrast, approximately 13 percent of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (see Figure 3).

Student Evaluations of the Following Statement: *The Classroom Activities and Instruction in my English 0098 Class Helped Me (or Are Helping Me) Meet the Objectives of My English 1101 Course*

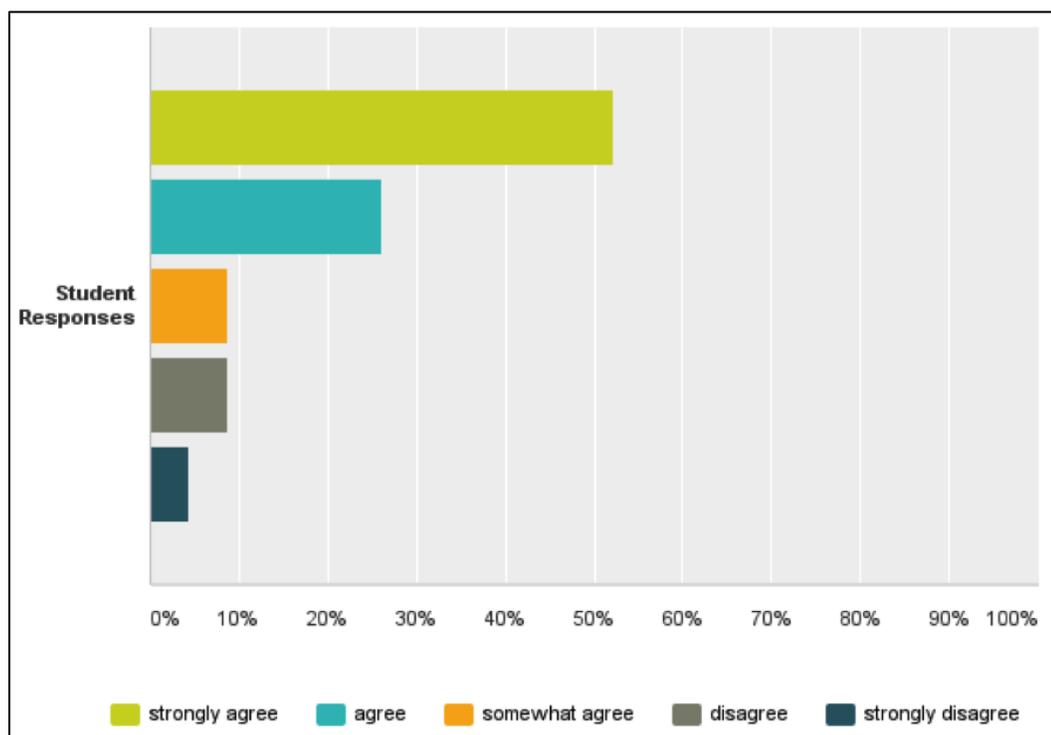


Figure 3. Student Perceptions of Helpfulness of English 0098

Additionally, students’ rankings of classroom practices, activities, and resources provided further insight into their perceptions of English 0098. The categories in this section of the questionnaire were as follows: class discussion, lecture, instructional aids, freewriting, journaling, group work, peer review, online resources, online workbook, and COMPASS test preparation. Online resources, such as Angel Learning, the school’s course content management system, were ranked the most helpful overall, which one

might find surprising considering that learning support students are typically assessed as weaker in the use of technology; however, the overall demographic of the students surveyed and the fact that the Mountain View campus is located in an affluent area challenge this statistic, as students of this campus are generally from greater socioeconomic backgrounds.

While online resources were ranked most helpful overall, COMPASS test preparation resources, such as practice passages, were ranked the least helpful overall in preparing students for English 1101. A possible root cause of this perception is that students did not recognize the larger connection between their success on the COMPASS and their success in first-year composition. In other cases, course instruction may not have included an adequate amount of COMPASS preparation activities for students to make the most informed opinion. The COMPASS test is also an emotionally charged topic, as students' success or failure on this exam is directly tied to whether they pass English 0098, which may have contributed to their perception overall. One student interviewed had to take English 0098 three times before she passed the Writing Skills portion of the COMPASS test (E. K., personal communication, 2012).

When each individual category is taken into account, most students ranked instructional aids (such as PowerPoint slides), lecture (including lessons on grammar and the writing process), class discussion, peer review, and group work as very helpful. One student commented that he found group work to be his most enjoyable aspect of the course, having helped him "get to know everyone" and "build relationships," which he viewed as vital to his success in the course and in English 1101 (D. G., personal communication, 2012). As for peer review, the same student found this activity to be very

helpful, for it helped him to see a “different perspective” in terms of the writing in others’ essays (D. G., personal communication, 2012).

Additionally, journaling ranked high in the helpful category while freewriting was ranked a tie between very helpful and helpful. The course’s online workbook was also ranked a tie between very helpful and helpful, with non-applicable coming in at a close second. For most classes, this product consists of either MyWritingLab or Aplia, essentially digital supplements to the course text through which students can access additional writing and grammar practice. Some instructors enforced the use of these products while others did not, which may have contributed to the polarized view of this resource. Test preparation for the COMPASS, while ranked least helpful overall, was ranked by most students as helpful when taken as an individual category (see Figure 4).

Student Evaluations of Classroom Practices, Activities, and Resources by Degree of Helpfulness

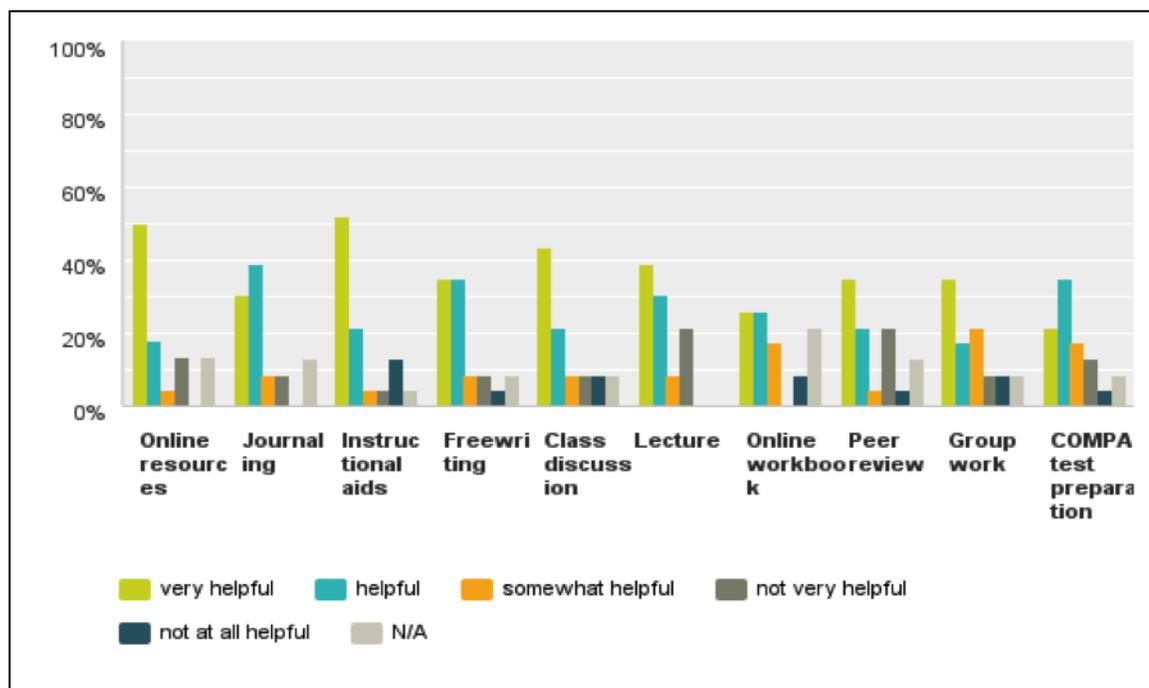


Figure 4. Classroom Practices, Activities, and Resources by Degree of Helpfulness

When asked whether they passed the Writing Skills section of the COMPASS test on their first or second attempt, 60 percent of students indicated they passed on the first attempt versus 40 percent who indicated they passed on the second attempt. At least three students, however, indicated that they failed the test after the maximum two attempts allowed, resulting in their having to repeat the course. All of those students subsequently passed the COMPASS and were able to register for English 1101.

When examined as a whole, the paper questionnaires indicate that most students strongly agree that English 0098 successfully prepared them for English 1101 and that of those classroom practices, activities, and resources reflected in the questionnaire, students found most of them in particular to be very helpful or helpful in preparing them for first-year composition. The high rate of students who passed the COMPASS on their first attempt also speaks to the overall quality of instruction and classroom environment that students received in English 0098 at the Mountain View campus of CTC.

Follow-up Interviews

The student interviews complemented the questionnaires well, as they added another layer of insight into the classroom experiences of basic writers at Mountain View. Coupled with the questionnaires, the interviews revealed that at the forefront of students' success in English 1101 and their persistence overall was an increase in self-confidence. While students knew the course was going to be more challenging, they felt confident that they could succeed, and as students reported, they ultimately did: "Writing got easier for me [in English 0098] with each paper I wrote. While we had to write more papers in English 1101 [than in 0098], I continued to progress with each one" (T. W., personal communication, 2012). This student went on to earn A's in both English 1101

and 1102 and completed a literature course at CTC. Students attributed their increased confidence and, thus, their success in English 1101 and beyond, to the following primary factors: written assignments, collaboration with peers (including peer review), improved writing processes, and instructor support.

As indicated by both the paper questionnaires and the personal interviews, students found writing assignments such as freewriting and journaling to be very beneficial to improving their written ability, thus giving them the confidence to succeed in English 1101. As one student stated, “I liked [opportunities] where we could freewrite. [Freewriting] gave us a chance to express ourselves. I actually wanted to do the assignment, with less fear of being wrong” (T. W., personal communication, 2012). As these comments indicate, when students have opportunities to write from a place of personal experience, they are able to establish themselves as authorities on their subject matter. Students “own” their topics, thus aiding in the development of these topics in a larger text, like an academic essay. Such comments also reflect the expressivist leanings of composition scholars like Elbow (1991), who argued that expressive discourse gives students “power” over their writing. Another student reflected on how being able to write on a topic dear to her made the experience of writing an academic, research-based essay much easier and more enjoyable (E. K., personal communication, 2012). Such classroom opportunities helped students generate topics on which to craft their essays with greater ease and helped them to better internalize the writing process.

Additionally, students attributed their improvement in writing and, thus, their success in English 1101 to the introduction to formal academic research that they received in English 0098. One student remarked that “the research paper was the most

helpful [writing assignment]” of the course because it showed him and others how to compile sources and how to cite them properly as well as how to properly format the paper (D. G., personal communication, 2012). As research-based writing is a major component of both English 1101 and 1102, having this framework by the end of English 0098 is extremely important.

Students’ overall success was also attributed to peer collaboration, including peer review. “Group activities, such as group review, helped [me do well] on tests and showed me the importance of studying,” stated one student. “I had a great relationship with everybody. People could ask one another for help, especially on their papers” (T. W., personal communication, 2012). This quote aligns with previous statements of how “building relationships” within the classroom proved a substantial element to achieving confidence and success (D. G., personal communication, 2012). This perspective also aligns with the questionnaires, as approximately 57 percent of students surveyed found peer review to be very helpful or helpful, and approximately 52 percent of students surveyed found group work in general to be either very helpful or helpful.

One of the most significant factors contributing to students’ success was an improvement in individual writing processes. The term “structure” resonated throughout the student interviews whenever students were asked how their writing changed as a result of being placed in English 0098. One student stated that she learned how to better structure her papers. “Before, I had trouble with ordering—transitioning from one topic to another. My writing improved a lot. I learned to stay on topic and to keep the reader’s attention [...] and how to wrap up a paper” (T. W., personal communication, 2012). Another student remarked, “I learned how to write a [stronger] thesis statement” as well

as how to give papers “better structure” through emphasizing “placement of ideas” (E. K., personal communication, 2012). Further, this student learned to write “stronger,” more “elaborate” sentences, thus, varying her sentence structures for more effective writing overall (E. K., personal communication, 2012). Lastly, one student commented that he learned to slow down and take his time with revising and proofreading his papers before turning them in. “Before, I just rushed to get [the essay] done so I could get back to video games. I take my time now; I’m more thorough [...] patient. I have greater attention to detail” (D. G., personal communication, 2012). Acquiring a better understanding of their own unique writing processes as well as learning to better articulate their own struggles with academic writing, students were better able to place their writing within the larger context of academic discourse. Overall, all students interviewed reported having greater confidence with writing essays by the time they were in English 1101.

By far, teacher support was credited as most influential in helping students succeed. As one student stated, “My teacher was more of an advisor than the actual advisors. When you can be comfortable with your instructor—able to go to them for anything—that is one of the best things that can happen [for a student]. I got super lucky” (D. G., personal communication, 2012).

Students, in general, reflected that while English 1101 was a more challenging course—for example, one student mentioned the course was faster-paced while another student commented that she had to study harder—they felt prepared for what lay ahead of them based on the level of instruction they received in English 0098. “My teacher’s skills were set on ‘I’m going to do what I need to do now to get you ready for 1101.’ We all

knew what to expect [in 1101],” stated one student (T. W., personal communication, 2012). Another student echoed this sentiment with, “[English 0098] prepared me so much for English 1101 and for other classes where I had to write papers” (E. K., personal communication, 2012). Truly, students felt a connection with their teacher and with their peers, which played a crucial role in their success in both courses.

This survey, while conducted at only one of CTC’s eight campuses, does provide a snapshot of those classroom practices, activities, and resources that students find beneficial to their outcomes in the class as well in their subsequent first-year composition course and does provide instructors of basic writing at either campus added perspective in terms of the design and execution of their own course curriculum. Further, instructors can see what practices can be improved upon in order for students to find even greater benefit.

As the survey portion of this study revealed, students, in general, believed their experience in English 0098 helped give them the foundation needed to be successful in English 1101. Additionally, students surveyed credited several classroom practices, activities, and resources as being either very helpful or helpful contributors to their overall success, most notably the instructional aids and lessons provided, class discussion, peer review, and online supplemental resources including the course content management system. Further, students found in-class writing at regular intervals through exercises such as freewriting or journaling to be of benefit. As amplified by the personal interviews in particular, students believed the abovementioned practices, activities, and resources—combined most importantly with the support of their instructors—helped give them the confidence to succeed.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The aims of this study were the following: to examine the rates at which learning support English students pass English 0098 and English 1101, to determine what pedagogical aspects of English 0098 students find to be most beneficial to their preparation for English 1101, and to evaluate students' perceptions of their own success in both courses. The goals of this study were met by employing several research strategies: analysis and interpretation of grades data, administration and interpretation of paper questionnaires, and conduct and interpretation of personal interviews. As the following information highlights, overall, the learning support English program at the Mountain View campus of Chattahoochee Technical College (CTC) is effective in its pursuit of preparing students for college English. Most important, however, is what this study revealed about the ways basic writers learn and thrive in the composition classroom. These revelations are significant not only for teachers of basic writing but also for teachers of first-year composition.

As revealed by grades earned in both English 0098 and English 1101 over a four-year period, greater than half of the students who enroll in English 0098 pass the course, and of those students who pass, greater than half complete English 1101. According to Rouche and Rouche, "Successful remedial programs [are] those having 50 percent or higher retention in developmental studies" (as cited in Hodges, 1998, p. 60). Further, as stated in Boylan and Bonham (1992), "One measure of the success of a developmental

program is the extent to which it prepares students to succeed in regular college courses. If the developmental courses are effective, students who pass developmental courses should also pass regular curriculum courses in the same or related disciplines” (p. 2). For these reasons, one can conclude that learning support English at CTC successfully prepares its students for first-year composition and increases the likelihood of these students completing a college degree.

The larger purpose of this study was to examine students’ perceptions of their own success relative to what the grades data revealed and to draw from both in evaluating the effectiveness of the learning support English program as a whole. To fulfill this purpose, it was important to understand not only grades earned but also the classroom environment and tools to which students attributed their success. The paper questionnaires and personal interviews were used to glean this information. Both revealed much about the ways students were able to achieve success.

First, when students are provided with regular opportunities to compose smaller, “lower-risk” writing assignments, such as freewriting or journaling, they gradually build confidence in their writing abilities, becoming less inhibited in the composing process. Additionally, they establish their own unique voice as writers and are better able to approximate academic discourse, thus situating themselves within the larger academic discourse community. This confidence carries over into first-year composition, where the assignments, while plentiful and more challenging, intimidate students much less because they have had plenty of “practice” joining the conversation.

Second, when the writing assignments in basic writing closely approximate those assigned in first-year composition, the transition from basic writing to first-year

composition is much easier for learning support students. Several students, for example, stated in their interviews that the experience of conducting academic research and composing a research-driven essay in English 0098 was very beneficial to them in English 1101 and beyond. While the assignments in English 0098 are less rigorous and academically challenging, they should, to a degree, align with the kinds of assignments students see in English 1101 and 1102.

Third, students thrive in collegial atmospheres. When basic writers are able to build relationships with their peers, in part, through activities like peer review, they feel less isolated, for they are able to see themselves in those around them. They discover that their academic goals and attitudes toward writing are very much like those of their peers. These relationships, over time, create a safe space in which students can share their writing with ease, gaining valuable feedback necessary for improving their writing. As their writing improves, so too does their confidence—an important factor for success in English 1101.

Finally, perhaps the most important piece to students' success is having a strong student-teacher relationship. When students are able to see their teachers as personal coaches, they are empowered to perform well not only in their learning support class but also in their college-level equivalent. Through regular, personalized feedback, whether through teacher comments on written assignments or through periodic “check-ins” between teacher and student, students feel as if they matter to their teachers and as if they are being taught by people who really value the importance of the classes they teach. This lends credibility to not only the teachers but also to the programs in which they teach. As indicated in the interviews, when students were comfortable enough with their teachers to

seek out their guidance in matters even beyond a simple writing assignment, they felt they were able to acquire the tools to succeed in English 0098 and in English 1101.

Overall, based on student feedback, supported by grades data, the learning support English curriculum at the Mountain View campus of CTC adequately prepares students for first-year composition. Further, this study sheds light on those teaching practices and classroom environments most vital to students' academic success and better informs the design of English 0098, as the study drew from the personal experiences of former learning support English students. When academic programs are able to empower students who might not otherwise have been able to achieve a college degree, this is nothing short of extraordinary. As this study revealed, basic writing programs are a necessity not simply for the foundation for success in academic discourse they present to those who enroll but for the emotional changes that students experience as they gain confidence and come to own their writing—their voice.

Implications for Further Research

Opportunities for further research exist, as this study was conducted at one particular campus. Additionally, the sample size was limited by the size of the campus selected. The learning support English program of other individual campuses or of the college as a whole could be examined applying the same or similar methodology. In particular, one could examine any differences in demographics as well as in student perceptions of the learning support program. For example, depending on the student makeup of a particular campus, the classroom environment necessary for student success may differ from that at another campus. Further, additional interviews could be conducted with composition faculty and school administrators, allowing additional

perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the learning support English program. Such additional studies could reveal much more about the ways basic writers and first-year composition students learn and become more proficient college writers, informing not only basic writing but also first-year composition pedagogy even further.

English 0098 Redesign

Since the completion of this study, the learning support program at CTC has undergone a redesign. Under this new design, all course levels have been condensed into one course, labeled 0900. This design also applies to developmental reading and mathematics. Students are still assessed and placed into learning support based on their scores on the COMPASS; however, instead of the learning support program consisting of discrete levels within a particular discipline, all students are placed into the same, unified course structure, and they work at their own pace.

This self-paced, directed study approach features a computer classroom in which students work through a series of modules. Students complete a pre-test at the beginning of each module, and if they score a 90 percent or higher, they may opt out of that module; otherwise, they work through the individual lessons within that module at their own pace. Provided they score 75 percent or higher on the module's post-test, students may then move onto the next module. Teachers act as facilitators more so than instructors, and, with the assistance of a lab monitor, they work with students one-on-one to address any particular areas in which the students are struggling. This new format, while touted by some as beneficial—because students can work at their own pace and complete learning support in either one or two semesters depending on how diligent they are—does create additional administrative burdens for learning support faculty, as they must continually

multi-task, stopping as needed to either sign a student into a test or meet with a student to share a grade earned on a particular module or written assignment.

While the modules, for the most part, are very grammar intensive, the last few modules of the learning support English course require students to complete several small writing assignments, starting at the paragraph level and progressing to the essay. Concerns from composition faculty arise based on several factors in particular: that students are not writing at regular intervals throughout the term and that students are not given an introduction to using secondary sources and crafting research-based essays, a vital component to both English 1101 and 1102. It will be important for faculty and administrators to conduct a study comparing this new learning support format to the more traditional course structure in terms of the rate of student retention and the benefits perceived by students.

Epilogue

Last spring I was invited to attend the graduation of one of my former students. In almost eight years of teaching, this was a first. I would get to see the “fruits” of both our labors come together in one very monumental moment. I would get to see firsthand the effects of developmental education on student success and retention. From my seat looking out onto the stage of a massive auditorium, I anxiously waited for my student’s name to be called and to see her walk proudly across that stage. As I sat, eyes and ears focused with razor-like precision, something quite surprising happened. I heard a familiar name, but not the name of the student I had come to see graduate. It was that of another student who had once sat in my classroom. *Wow*, I thought, *he graduated, too!* By the time I saw the student I was actually in attendance for walk across the stage, I had heard

the names of at least four other students who had successfully completed their journey of achieving a college degree. My eyes teared, and my chest swelled with pride.

While the list of familiar names called that day was by no means exhaustive, at least as far as those students I had taught were concerned, it still serves as a reminder that with hard work and determination, success is possible, no matter how long it takes. Those names and faces also serve as a reminder of our history of basic writing programs and of why we teachers of basic writing work as hard as we do in service to our students.

I stayed back following the ceremony to greet some of my students and pose for photographs. No matter their varied backgrounds, they all had one thing in common—the huge smiles plastered across their faces. They also had the heart and determination to keep at it, no matter how many tests they failed or other adversity they encountered. They thrived, in part, because of the programs in place to help underprepared students succeed in college—programs that give students opportunities that they might not otherwise have. They also thrived because within those programs exist teachers who also “keep at it,” no matter how much work it takes.

REFERENCES

- Adams, P. D. (1993). Basic writing reconsidered. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 12(1), 22-36.
- Bartholomae, D. (1985). Inventing the university. In S. Miller (Ed.), *The norton book of composition studies* (pp. 605-630). New York: W. W. Norton.
- Boylan, H. R. & Bonham, B. S. (1992). The impact of developmental education programs. *Review of Research in Developmental Education*, 9(5), 1-3.
- Chattahoochee Technical College. (2012). Accreditations. Retrieved from <http://www.chattahoocheetech.edu/about-us/accreditations/>.
- Chattahoochee Technical College. (2012). Mission, vision, core values. Retrieved from <http://www.chattahoocheetech.edu/about-us/mission-vision-core-values/>.
- Chattahoochee Technical College. (2012). President's message. Retrieved from <http://www.chattahoocheetech.edu/about-us/presidents-message/>.
- Elbow, P. (1991) Some thoughts on *Expressive Discourse*: A review essay. In S. Miller (Ed.), *The norton book of composition studies* (pp. 933-942). New York: W. W. Norton.
- Flower, L. & Hayes, J. R. (1980). The cognition of discovery: Defining a rhetorical problem. In S. Miller (Ed.), *The norton book of composition studies* (pp. 467-478). New York: W. W. Norton.
- Hodges, D. Z. (1998). Evaluating placement and developmental studies programs at a technical institute: Using ACT's Underprepared Student Follow-up Report. *Community College Review*, 26(2), 57-66.

- Hodges, D. Z., & Kennedy, N. H. (2004). Editor's choice: Post-testing in developmental education: A success story. *Community College Review*, 32(3), 35-42.
- Kasden, L. N. (1980). An introduction to basic writing. In L. N. Kasden & D. R. Hoerber (Eds.), *Basic writing: Essays for teachers, researchers, and administrators* (pp. 1-9). Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Levin, H. M., & Calcagno, J. C. (2008). Remediation in the community college. *Community College Review*, 35(3), 181-207.
- MacNealy, M. S. (1999). *Strategies for empirical research in writing*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Otte, G. & Mlynarczyk, R. W. (2010). Historical overview. *Basic writing* (pp. 3-40). West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press.
- Perl, S. (1980). A look at basic writers in the process of composing. In L. N. Kasden & D. R. Hoerber (Eds.), *Basic writing: Essays for teachers, researchers, and administrators* (pp. 13-32). Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Shaughnessy, M. P. (1977). *Errors and expectations: A guide for the teacher of basic writing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sommers, N. (1980). Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers. In S. Miller (Ed.), *The norton book of composition studies* (pp. 323-332). New York: W. W. Norton.
- Sweigart, W. (1996). Assessing achievement in a developmental writing sequence. *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, 12, 5-15.
- Troyka, L. Q. (1987). Defining basic writing in context. In T. Enos (Ed.), *A sourcebook for basic writing teachers* (pp. 2-15). New York: Random House.

White, E. M. (1995). The importance of placement and basic studies: Helping students succeed under the new elitism. *Journal of Basic Writing, 14*(2), 75-84.

Wolcott, W. (1996). Evaluating a basic writing program. *Journal of Basic Writing, 15*(1), 57-69.

Appendix A

Paper Questionnaire

Survey of Classroom Experiences in English 0098 at Chattahoochee Technical College

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The information you provide will be kept anonymous and used solely for the purposes of this study.

1. For how many quarters/semesters (terms) have you been enrolled at Chattahoochee Tech?

2. In what program of study are you currently enrolled in at Chattahoochee Tech?

3. What are your professional and/or educational goals?

4. What is your educational background? Check all that apply:

earned GED

graduated high school

some prior college experience

If you checked "some prior college experience," did it result in either of the following? Check all that apply:

degree

diploma

certificate

neither of the above

Explain: _____

returning student

5. Did you complete English 0098 at Chattahoochee Tech prior to enrolling in English 1101?

Yes

No

If you checked "no," no additional data is needed from you at this time. Thank you for

your participation in this questionnaire.

If you checked "yes," please continue with the questionnaire.

6. What is your age?

18-24

25-30

31-35

36-40

41+

7. What is your gender?

Male

Female

8. Please rank the following statement using this scale: 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) somewhat agree, 4) disagree, 5) strongly disagree:

The classroom activities/ instruction in my English 0098 class helped me (or are helping me) meet the objectives of my English 1101 course:

strongly agree

agree

somewhat agree

disagree

strongly disagree

9. Please rank the following classroom practices in your English 0098 class in terms of helping you meet the course objectives of English 1101 on the following scale: 1) very helpful, 2) helpful, 3) somewhat helpful, 4) not very helpful, 5) not at all helpful, 6) does not apply. Circle the number that applies to each item:

Class discussion 1 2 3 4 5 6

Freewriting 1 2 3 4 5 6

Group work 1 2 3 4 5 6

Lecture (ex: grammar lessons, the writing process)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Journaling	1	2	3	4	5	6
Peer Review	1	2	3	4	5	6
Online resources (ex: Angel Learning)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Instructional aids (ex: PowerPoints, videos)	1	2	3	4	5	6
COMPASS test prep (ex: practice passages, Web links)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Online workbook (ex: MyWritingLab, Aplia)	1	2	3	4	5	6

Additional Comments:

10. Did you pass the COMPASS Writing exit test on your first or second attempt?

_____ First
_____ Second

-OR-

Did your test-taking experience result in having to repeat English 0098? If so, how many times did you complete this course prior to enrolling in English 1101? _____

(On a separate sheet that students can tear off)

If you would like to contribute further to this research study by participating in a personal interview, please provide the following information:

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone (optional): _____

Appendix B

Student Interview Questions

1. In what quarter/semester (term) did you begin taking classes at Chattahoochee Tech?
2. Did you complete the COMPASS or ASSET (alternative test) placement test in writing? In reading or math?
3. Based on your scores, were you placed in developmental studies courses other than English 0098?
4. Did you pass English 0098 the first time you completed it? If not, how many attempts did it take?
5. Have you completed any English courses other than English 1101 since you completed English 0098?
6. Think back to your time in English 0098. What did the classroom look like? Where did you sit?
7. What were your expectations prior to enrolling in English 0098? What did you expect to learn? What assignments did you expect to complete? What did you learn? What types of assignments did you complete? Which ones did you enjoy/ not enjoy and why?
8. Describe the relationship you had with your classmates. With your teacher.
9. How often did you interact with your instructor outside of class throughout the quarter? How quickly did your instructor reply to e-mails or return work, tests, etc.?
10. Describe the teacher-feedback you received in English 0098. How was it helpful/ not helpful and why?
11. Can you recall a class day in particular that you really enjoyed? What was the lesson? What activities did you do? What did your instructor do? What about a class day in particular that you did not enjoy? Again, what was the lesson? What did the students do? What did the teacher do?
12. Can you recall the overall course structure of English 0098? How were most class days organized? What kinds of lessons/ activities did students participate in a majority of the time?

13. Describe your transition from English 0098 to English 1101. What came more easily for you? What did you struggle with? How did these experiences relate with the rest of your classmates'?

14. As you were/are completing English 1101, was/is there anything in particular that you wished your instructor had emphasized in English 0098?

15. What classroom activities/ practices were most helpful in your preparation for English 1101?

16. What classroom activities/ practices were the least helpful in your preparation for English 1101?

17. Describe your writing process prior to completing English 0098? How has your process changed since completing English 0098? How has your writing changed?

18. In what ways did your writing or reading improve after completing English 0098?

Tabatha W. Martin
tabathamartin905@gmail.com

Summary

Writing and editing professional with more than seven years combined experience in English education, proofreading, copyediting, writing, print formatting, and document production; proficient in several style guides, including Chicago, AP, APA, and MLA, with exceptional communication skills and excellent attention to English grammar and punctuation; results-driven with impeccable attention to detail; proven ability to work both independently and collaboratively while managing multiple projects in a deadline-driven environment

Education

Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA

Master of Arts in Professional Writing – 2015

Composition and Rhetoric

Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA

Bachelor of Arts in English, Magna cum Laude – 2007

Awards & Memberships

Undergraduate Honors Scholar (2007)

Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society (2006-present)

Golden Key International Honour Society (2006-present)

Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society (2004-present)

Recipient of the HOPE Scholarship (2004-2007)

Multiple recipient of the Dean's List and President's List (2004-2007)

Experience

Institute of Nuclear Power Operations, Marietta, GA

Editor, Communications Services – 2014-present

- Copyedit various internal and external technical documents, including accreditation reports, plant evaluation reports, trip reports, event reports, various internal documents, digests, and miscellaneous articles for INPO's Member Website.
- Coordinate document production, from establishing turnaround times on projects to working closely with clients to produce high-quality products.
- Deliver editorial workshops in an ongoing effort to enhance all internal and external communications at INPO.
- Maintain the organization's writing and style manual.
- Provide additional writing and editing assistance to the Communications Department.

Huntington Learning Center, Marietta, GA

Teacher/Assistant Director of Education/Teacher – 2012-2014

- Provided one-on-one and small group instruction in phonics, reading comprehension, writing, study skills, and SAT/ACT preparation
- Built client relationships through fostering students' confidence and growth

- Prepared documents and other notes for parent conferences
- Developed master writing curriculum for grades 4-12
- Managed students' academic programs and monitored progress
- Managed the teaching floor
- Monitored teacher blogs for subject-tutor students
- Reprogrammed students in conjunction with Center Director
- Conducted interim conferences with parents and students
- Was responsible for marketing, including school and merchant visits
- Demonstrated proficiency in office management, including phone calls, inquiries, schedule changes, payments, and LCOS database
- Prepared teaching floor for the day ahead: assigned teachers, called teachers with hours, etc.
- Ensured teaching process was going as expected; jumped in as necessary
- Observed, coached, and evaluated teaching staff of approximately twenty teachers in conjunction with Center Director

American Book Company, Woodstock, GA

Editor – 2013-2014

- Worked with writers, editors, architects, and publisher, reviewing print and electronic text, images, graphics, and documents for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting before being submitted for publication and distribution
- Demonstrated proficiency in reading and correcting errors in English language arts, math, science, and social studies in addition to other company communications in accordance with Chicago Manual of Style guidelines and house specifications
- Verified that all published material had copyright permission
- Researched standards and evaluated content written to meet them
- Evaluated content for instructional design as prescribed by the curriculum designer
- Communicated with director of content development on project process and needs
- Provided voice-over and acting assistance for educational recordings and videos

Chattahoochee Technical College, Marietta, GA

Adjunct Instructor, Learning Support English – 2008-2013

- Developed syllabus and course curriculum in accordance with the objectives of the Technical College System of Georgia and the Department of Humanities at Chattahoochee Technical College
- Provided basic writing instruction to classes of approximately twenty to thirty students, emphasizing the writing process, paragraph development, moving from paragraph to essay, and grammar/punctuation
- Prepared students for the COMPASS exit test in writing through regular instruction in grammar/punctuation and practice in proofreading
- Met with students upon request to discuss grades and overall progress
- Referred students to additional resources (i.e. Student Success Center, Student Affairs Department) as necessary
- Administered all grades

Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA

Graduate Teaching Assistant, First-Year Composition – 2009-2012

- Assisted students one-on-one at the KSU Writing Center with the development of academic essays and additional writing tasks across all stages of the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing)

- Conducted writer's workshops for the KSU Writing Center on topics including punctuation use and research and citation
- Developed syllabus and course curriculum in accordance with the objectives of the Board of Regents and the FYC program at KSU
- Provided writing instruction to classes of approximately twenty-six students, emphasizing content/organization, (grammar/punctuation, style, and rhetorical effectiveness
- Met with students upon request to discuss grades and overall progress
- Referred students to additional resources (i.e. KSU Writing Center, Director of First-Year Composition) as necessary
- Administered all grades

Kennesaw State University College of the Arts, Kennesaw GA

Intern, Public Relations Department – 2010-2011

- Interviewed faculty, staff, and students
- Conducted necessary background research for stories assigned
- Wrote and edited press releases, student profile pieces, web stories, and feature stories for the KSU College of the Arts' (website and publication, *Flourish* magazine)

Volunteer Experience

The Red Clay Review, Kennesaw, GA

Reader (Editor) – 2010-2011

- Read and reviewed submissions for *The Red Clay Review*, the Graduate Writers Association's literary magazine

Kennesaw State University Undergraduate Creative Writing Contest, Kennesaw, GA

Judge, Fiction – 2011

- Read and judged student entries in the category of short fiction for the first annual Undergraduate Creative Writing Contest at Kennesaw State University

Presentations

Kennesaw State University Department of English Spring Festival, Kennesaw, GA – 3/2011

Graduate School Panel

- Represented the Master of Arts in Professional Writing Program at Kennesaw State as part of a panel discussion on graduate school programs as well as preparing for graduate school in general

Southeastern Writing Center Association Annual Conference, Tuscaloosa, AL – 2/2011

“So this is Teaching? The Writing Center as a TA Training Site”

- Represented the Kennesaw State University Writing Center as part of a panel discussion on peer tutoring as solid preparation for teaching in the composition classroom