The impact of inclusiveness and rurality in developmental student writing needs and curricular responses: A Pasifika community college case study

Charles Allen Brown
Purdue University

Abstract: *This qualitative case study considered the following question: How did an open door policy combined with limitations of a rural setting impact students' developmental English writing needs and curricular responses at one Pacific island community college? The focus institution was a small community college serving several Micronesian islands with a total population of around 50,000. Guided by a Context, Input, Process, Output (CIPO) model, I employed institutional document analysis, on-site observation, discussions and interviews with teachers, samples of students' work, and interviews with students to understand the social setting (Context), learner skills and experiences (Input), the curriculum (Process), and how institutional responses (Output) addressed students' needs. Results indicated that students' writing needs were complex as a result of unreadiness for college writing combined with their wide-ranging goals. Although the institution responded with a developmental English writing sequence, resources constrained this response. Course offerings were slender, and teachers possessed limited qualifications for this work. Thus, more innovative and responsive practices in developmental English were not enacted. Also, all teachers were off-island cultural outsiders; this had important pedagogical implications. Overall, since the community college open-door policy invites the developmental learner, providing for the needs of these individuals is critical. Yet, this is a resource-intensive undertaking. This demonstration of how resource constraints impacted developmental English learners is important in foregrounding challenges for other*

small-scale, high-diversity, rural schools. It also sheds light on one more challenge facing Pacific Island people.

1. Introduction

"Open door" enrollment is integral to the community college mission as a gateway to higher education. In practice, this approach extends higher education access to students with greater outside commitments, lower financial resources, and, especially, weaker academic preparation and a track record of less academic success. Serving such students implies a number of challenges for institutions such as the need for strong academic advising, robust tutoring and academic support services, offering classes at varying times and locations, and providing more online offerings. Such support involves mustering various resources. Yet, this is especially difficult in the case of the small, rural community college. While research has amply addressed the issue of meeting the learning needs of diverse students and the challenges facing small, rural community colleges, little research has investigated implications of both combined. In this project, I do so by considering students' developmental English learning needs and how they were addressed at a small Pacific island community college. Serving a diverse population as the only community college in its archipelago, the institution was small and isolated, as is the case with many rural schools. In addition to examining the confluence of institutional diversity and rurality, this research is important since developmental English classes represent a "gatekeeper" for many subsequent college courses. This work also foregrounds challenges facing Pacific island learners, a group with low visibility in research conducted in the United States.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Community college access and diverse "inputs" and "outputs"

Lowering barriers to participation in higher education represents a cornerstone of the community college mission. One dimension of

this approach is the so-called "open door" or "mass-access" policy of most community colleges (Dougherty, Lahr & Morest, 2017). As a result, community colleges are heterogeneous in terms of "inputs" in the form of students accepted. Most notably, the community college serves many students who are underprepared for work at the college level (Bragg & Durham, 2012). The diversity implied by increased access is highlighted by comparing community college students with their "traditional" college counterparts. Community college enrollees are more likely to also have jobs, to be students of color, to be recent immigrants, and to be language learners (Mullin, 2012). Many are low-wage workers (Matus-Grossman & Gooden, 2001). Also, many are first-generation college students.

Throughout their history, American community colleges have increasingly embraced inclusiveness in terms of "outputs" as well. The American community college emerged in the early 20th century in order to better prepare students for the university (Drury, 2003). Later, demands of a more mechanized workplace coupled with a heightened belief in the role of post-secondary education in promoting greater opportunity for social mobility prompted a commitment to increased educational access (Cohen, 1996). By the 1930s, the community college had also come to include vocational training (Brint & Karabel, 1989). As the workplace gained an increasingly high-tech orientation in the 1970s and 1980s, both the popularity of the community college as a whole and its role in vocational/technical training accelerated (Drury, 2003). Coupled with this vocational and technical training dimension, the community college also has retained a strong commitment to preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions. These diverse learning goals for students represent the "outputs" of these institutions.

2.2 Best practices in meeting students' developmental English needs

The community college commitment to open access implies challenges for English teaching, the focus of the present study. Many community college students are under-prepared for college work (Levin & Calcagno, 2007). Thus, many are at risk of failing to complete their studies (Bound, Lovenheim & Turner, 2009). A strong need exists, therefore, to tailor instruction to meet the needs of those lacking in previous academic success. In particular, community college teachers must often adjust their practice to scaffold students from a remedial level (McIntosh & Rouse, 2009). Offering special developmental programs, typically in English and math, represents a common institutional-level response. Specialized training of teachers is critical for such developmental education (McLenney, 2009).

Yet, there are important problems with the developmental mission. One shortcoming is that these courses actually tend to be taught by less-experienced teachers and by adjuncts rather than by highly-trained and strongly supported specialists (Young, 2002). The situation gives rise to courses often being of low quality (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Students in developmental programs have especially low rates of persistence. Data indicate that fewer than half enrolled in the course even complete developmental math (Brock, 2010). Thus, the "leaky pipeline" metaphor is an apt one for describing developmental education in the community college (Hern & Snell, 2010). As developmental sequences become longer, student attrition rates accelerate (Xu, 2016). Ultimately, graduation rates for students who begin their college careers enrolled in developmental courses are low (Vanora, 2012). The irony is that courses intended to bolster the success of students often seem to actually represent an impediment to their ultimate success.

Given the challenges facing English teaching, adopting established best practices is critical in "patching the leaky pipeline"

so as to increase learner success. This need has been increasingly acknowledged: As one dimension of the broader "accountability" discourse in higher education, there has been an accompanying shift in focus from equity in access to equity in outcomes for community colleges (Bahr, 2010; Taylor, 2015). More effective student support is key (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl & Leinbach, 2005). Most community college students must complete developmental English, making the need for improved results in these classes especially acute.

In most cases, developmental English focuses upon writing. Recent advances in English writing pedagogy have eschewed some more traditional teaching methods in the field. Approaches rooted in behavioral psychology have been especially questioned in favor of a turn to a more holistic, cognitive stance. For example, Hern and Snell (2010) note the success of a program in which "English does not progress from courses on sentence writing, to courses on paragraph writing, and then expository and argumentative essays. Instead, students at all levels read full-length books, mostly non-fiction, and are guided in strategies for understanding and engaging these texts" (p. 6). One central theme in present approaches to both developmental and mainstream writing has been the cross-disciplinary approach in which classes provide students to write across the curriculum. This prepares students for writing they will actually called upon to do in the academy and afterward rather than inculcating forms of artifice such as the "compare and contrast essay" essay which does not represent real-world writing (Wardle, 2009). Such thinking has prompted an increased recognition of the importance of teaching those skills needed for writers to tackle a variety of types of writing seen in the real world as opposed to an exclusive focus upon traditional school writing. In particular, efforts to foster awareness of the norms of various genres of writing and strategies to address new writing situations have gained prominence (e.g., Brent, 2011; Clark & Hernandez, 2011). Such developments have transformed writing pedagogy away from the reliance on, for

example, the traditional five-paragraph essay which is seen by many policy makers, practitioners, and scholars as an artifact of misplaced beliefs about writing (e.g., Brannon, et al., 2008; Lynch, 2011; Schwartz, 2014).

The adoption of a "learning communities" strategy has also shown promise in fostering greater success for developmental English students (Scrivener, 2008). This approach involves making thematic links among a number of courses. Students enroll in a "cohort" system, taking various classes with the same peers and making connections among courses through writing. Barnes and Piland (2010) describe the use of this approach at an urban community college with a complement of around 15,000 students in southern California. In this case "faculty worked together to develop themes for the courses and special services such as in-course tutors. Learning community faculty also received special professional development and planning time to develop the themes used in the courses" (p. 10). As this suggests, strong support for both students and teachers is critical in such approaches. One particularly important dimension of this support is tutoring or "learning assistance centers" with highly-trained tutors (Perin, 2004). In many developmental models, the college writing center takes on a critical role. Indeed, the importance of the college writing center is reflected in the fact that at least one prominent scholarly journal is dedicated to writing center best practices. The specialized training required of those working in these centers is reflected in abundant research on the topic. For example, the nature of verbal interactions between tutors and their client writers during conferences is crucial in conference success and has been the focus of a number of scholarly treatments (e.g., Nordlof, 2014; Thompson, 2009). Working with mainstream, developmental, ESL, EFL, and Generation 1.5 writers all require different responses and underlying training (e.g., Thonus, 2003).

A final trend in community college teaching with important implications for English education has been a redoubled effort to

forge stronger connections between the classroom and the workplace. Throughout its history, the community college mission has included a sometimes uneasy navigation of the commitment to both vocational and academic preparation. While not mutually exclusive, it is certainly the case that they each involve very different pedagogical dimensions, especially when it comes to language teaching. For one thing, the increasing complexity of the world of work implies an accompanying sophistication in linguistic knowledge required to communicate within it. Thus, there is a heightened need for attention to language skills in vocational training. Also, there is a risk of making language teaching too "academic" and not focused sufficiently on vocational skills (Blanchard, Casdos & Sheski, 2009). Forging connections between the classroom and the workplace is also important because adult students often respond positively to a task-oriented approach in which what is taught is connected to the solution of real-world problems. Yet, few education programs serving adults make sufficient efforts to establish links to the world of work (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). An example of the power of connecting teaching of basic academic competencies with real-world skills is Washington State's "I-Best" initiative. This program taps into the power of the "contextual instruction" approach in which instruction is linked to content of interest to students; in this case, this content is derived from students' areas of professional preparation (Jenkins, Zeidenberg, & Kienzl, 2009).

2.3 The rural community college and resource constraints

While the Pacific may not spring to mind when the word "rural" is mentioned, the Pacific island setting is "rural" in important ways. The first is profound physical isolation which, among other effects, often gives rise to a slower adoption of innovations (Balfour, 2009; Li, Lang & Liu, 2015). Rural contexts are also characterized by smaller-scale institutions and geographic dispersal resulting in an impact upon institutional efficiency due to challenges in enacting

economies of scale (Cloke, 2006). Finally, like many rural contexts, Pacific islands are low in educational attainment and public resources and high in poverty.

Resource constraints are especially problematic for the rural community college. While community colleges in general are not sufficiently funded, rural community colleges especially struggle with inadequate financial support (Hagedorn, 2010; Katsinas, Tollefson, & Reamey, 2008). Compounding this challenge is the fact that community college students possess lower cultural capital associated with higher education meaning that extra resources must be dedicated to remediation. In addition, the smaller scale of local, rural institutions represents an additional challenge (Eller, Jensen, Robbins, Russell, Salant, Torres, et al., 2003). Rural colleges cannot benefit from the economies of scale that allow larger schools to offer more diverse programs and forms of support. There are many tangible examples. For example, the adoption of technical innovations has been slower among community colleges with lower resources and human capital (Cox, 2005). Low teacher support is an additional constraint, especially in terms of resources for faculty development (Howard & Tabor, 2010). Finally, the rural institution not only struggles for funding, but also to attract adequately-trained faculty and staff (Miller & Tuttle, 2006). Yet, in the case of English teaching, resources of various forms as well as the recruitment and ongoing professional development of faculty are critical. This is especially true given rapid changes in field coupled with the role of English learning as a conduit toward student success. This apparent conflict between the needs of the developmental English classrooms and the constraints of the rural community college makes the examination of this situation particularly research-worthy. In light of this, I focused on the following research questions in this study.

2.4 Research questions

The main research question in this study was: How did inclusiveness and rurality impact meeting students' English writing needs at a small Pacific island community college?

There were three sub-questions:

1. How did an open door policy impact students' developmental English writing needs?
2. How did the institution respond with a developmental curriculum?
3. How did this response address students' needs?
4. What was the impact of rurality in this response?

3. Materials and methods

The study site was optimal for considering the interplay between inclusiveness and rurality in the teaching of English. The focus institution served a population of around 50,000 on the archipelago where the college was situated. This small population is, nonetheless, highly diverse with large numbers of East Asians, Filipinos, and Pacific Islanders. Part of the United States, the language of wider communication is English which is also the language of instruction in the college. The college itself was small, enrolling between 1100 and 1300 students.

This research was informed by the Context, Input, Process, Output (CIPO) model. This model is valuable as an evaluative and research framework because it fosters rigorous explication of the variables important in goal attainment among educational institutions. The classic CIPO model considers the interplay among Context such as the social setting and policies at play, Inputs in the form of resources and teacher skills, Process in the form of the curriculum and educative activities undertaken, and Output in the form of skills acquired by students (Scheerens, 1990). While this

model is most closely associated with quantitative research, in this project I used it to foster a clearer understanding of the interactions among important aspects of a qualitative study. I adapted the CIPO approach, seeking to understand the social setting (Context), learner skills (Input), the curriculum (Process), and how students' learning needs were matched by institutional responses (Output). The overarching focus here was upon how rurality and inclusiveness impacted this "equation."

This implied collecting various forms of data. I especially drew upon an ethnographic approach as a participant-observer in the society as well as a teaching in the institution for one year. The use of ethnographic observation, ethnographic fieldnotes, and ethnographic interviewing fostered the collection of nuanced data revealing both the social setting as well as individuals' perspectives of their role within it (Heyl, 2001; Merriam, 2009). In this case, I was able to especially learn about the society so as to better understand students' backgrounds as well as opportunities and implications for writing skills. I also interviewed students to understand their experiences with writing as well as their learning and career goals. To gain an appreciation of the process in play, I added an analysis of curriculum documents, course guides, teacher syllabi, and materials used. I also used collections of student classwork, and class observations. Ascertaining the outputs of this case involved an assessment of how well students' needs were met. I considered students needs as entailing the difference between their goals and their incoming English skills. Then, I compared this with the approach actually used with an awareness of best practices in the field of developmental English. I added information on learning outcomes gleaned from applicable questions in student and teacher interviews as well as by analyzing student work.

I employed two methods to foster better reliability of the findings. First, since this was a project drawing upon ethnographic methods such as the collection of fieldnotes, I sought to collect several types of data to address particular questions in a type of

"triangulation" of data. A second common method of promoting accurate conclusions is the use of member checks in which findings are shared with participants so as to elicit their feedback (Given, 2008). In this case, I discussed my emerging conclusions both with faculty as well as with students themselves. College documents about student satisfaction with courses, and, especially, statistics regarding student retention were important. In analyzing all materials, I drew upon thematic analysis to understand issues of importance in each dimension of the CIPO model used in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).For example, important aspects of the social setting, students' feelings about writing in school, and students' future goals and needs broke naturally down into a number of important themes. As with typical qualitative work, I used selected data examples such as interview excerpts to illustrate and lend credence to interpretations in the written product. Complying with applicable norms for research ethics, I disclosed my research efforts and received permission from participants. I informed all participants that participation was voluntary and that their identities would not be revealed. In the case of my own students, I elicited their participation only after I submitted their course grades so as to avoid any conflict of interest. Due to the small scale of the society, I withhold the identity of the institution.

4. Results

4.1 The setting (Context)

The society in which the college was located was highly diverse with Pacific Islanders, Filipinos, and East Asians being strongly represented. The Pacific Islanders had almost all been born within the archipelago while members of the other groups were virtually all immigrants. Socio-economic status and educational attainment in the locale were low, with most individuals having no college education. Many had not completed high school. The Pacific Islanders exhibited a strong family orientation with many traditional

college-age students already having children. One testament to the isolation, low resources, and family orientation was the fact that a few students had never left the island where the focus institution was located. In a discussion one student noted that, "I have never even been to [a neighboring island, easily visible from the college], but my mom says not to worry because my chance will come."

This locale represented a rural context in many respects. At around 50,000 people, the scale of the society was small. Travel to the nearest city of over 100,000 was only by international flights. As a result, services in the area were limited. The focus institution itself was small, typically enrolling around 1300 students. The size of the full-time instructional staff was around 30 individuals with part-time instructors numbering around 40. The college offered degrees and certifications in Business, Criminal Justice, Education, Health and Physical Education, Social Work, Nursing, and Natural Resource Management. Resources in general were scant. For example, facilities were quite dated with classrooms being re-purposed single-story wood structures that had formerly been used as a medical clinic. The college had one small library, employing a single librarian as well as a small study room. The gymnasium, destroyed in a typhoon several years before, had not been rebuilt due to insufficient funds. Parking for most students was ad hoc in an unpaved field or at the side of the road bordering the campus.

Students exhibited many axes of diversity. They varied highly in terms of their origins and home languages with Mandarin, Tagalog, Carolinian, and Chamorro comprising most of this linguistic variation. According to the most recent available statistics as of 2018, 43% of students enrolled were Pacific Islanders while 40% were Asian (NCES, 2018). Virtually no students came from families in which English was the primary home language. The Pacific Islanders were native-born US citizens while most of the East Asian and Filipino students had immigrated to the US as adults. Thus, both the language skills as well as awareness of and comfort with the culture and society also varied. Since educational

attainment in the society as a whole was low, most students were first-generation college students. This also impacts possession of cultural capital associated with higher education success since the "hows and whys" of college were often not family knowledge. Students often had additional challenges. Many were non-traditional students. Those with children sometimes missed class due to a lack of childcare. Most students were employed, many on a full time basis. For example, one developmental course student with whom I spoke, worked all night at McDonalds prior to arriving for classes in the morning. Another worked the night shift at a local hotel before morning class.

4.2 Learner needs (Input)

The gap between students' learning goals and their present skills represent their needs. Learning goals varied in this study, running the gamut from short-term vocational training to transfer to off-island universities. Most students indicated the desire to complete their programs within the institution and then to pursue work in fields such as law enforcement, positions in schools, office jobs, and the tourism industry. A minority hoped to transfer to four-year universities in the Mainland United States. The most recent statistics provided by the college indicate challenges in meeting all of these goals. For example, on-time graduation rates among students intending to earn 2-year degrees averaged 3.8% for the ten-year period ending in 2017 (most recent data). After three years, this graduation rate increased to 17.4%. One-year retention rates averaged 62.5% for the ten-year period ending in 2018 (most recent data). Thus, degree completion and even retention represented an institution-wide demonstration of the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon. Although statistics are unavailable, student and teacher interviews as well as observations of the society indicate that few students were able to transfer to four-year institutions. The most recent statistics provided by the institution indicate 19.75% of students subsequently transferred to another college or university. Since this includes

transfer to other community colleges, actual transfer to universities is lower. In addition any academic challenges, the cost of university placed this goal out of reach for most. An additional issue is the strong role of extended family in the culture of Pacific Islanders, making relocation difficult for members of this group. Yet, moving far away is unavoidable for those wishing to attend university since no such institutions exist locally.

In terms of present skills, students' lack of preparation for college-level writing was especially acute. According to institutional statistics, 90% of incoming students enrolled in the developmental courses. Students were placed into English courses based upon the results of a standardized English test. This test used short reading excerpts and accompanying questions to assess students' skills in formal academic reading and writing with an emphasis on vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and comprehension of reading excerpts. After taking the test, students placed into either the mainstream first-year composition course or into one of the two developmental courses in the sequence.

Harnessing the potency of the qualitative approach, I sought to understand students' writing needs with greater nuance. Previous experiences with academic writing shed light not only on these students' lack of success but on the manner in which traditional academic writing instruction had failed them. Three related themes emerged in interviews conducted with 61 students enrolled in the developmental writing courses. The first was that they viewed writing itself as valuable and enjoyable. One noted that "art can be drawings for me it's words that are my piece of art." For another, the creation of fan fiction represented a means of self-expression through writing. A second theme, though, was fear and confusion surrounding academic writing. One student spoke or her love of writing in elementary school, but that she later came to strongly dislike school writing because of the way it was taught and evaluated. One interviewee complained that "[school writing uses] diction from the 1950s." Others equated good academic writing

simply with the avoidance of errors, construing academic writing as a struggle to conform to rules rather than to enjoy, to be challenged, to come to voice, to communicate, and to take on ownership. For example, one individual felt that "[c]orrect grammar, spelling, and punctuation are key in written communications." "I sometimes feel ashamed because I will wonder whether I am wrong or not" another student mused, indicating a connection between her feelings and the pursuit of the "right" answer. Several interviewees spoke of writing in school as an exercise in "giving the teachers what they want" rather than enjoyable work or work cultivating skills valuable outside of school. The final theme was students' lack of success with writing for school, coupled with fear and shame associated with academic writing. In an email follow-up, one interviewee indicated that "although, I can honestly say that there are times where I would need help with my writing skills at school, I wouldn't ask my peers or teachers for help because I am too shy." In interviews, students used the words nervous, panic, and insecurity to characterize writing for school. Another connected her writing to her social background, noting that "If you're from [this island] like me. Then you should know that most of the people here have poor writing skills."

The foregoing suggests several things: First, these students had a variety of eventual goals for their writing as an outgrowth of their varied career trajectories. Importantly, the interviews indicated that these individuals did not simply hate writing. Indeed, many enjoyed it. Yet, their present level of academic writing was lower than that required in traditional academic tasks. Finally, their previous experiences with English writing classes had not met their needs. Especially in failing to forge connections between their writerly selves and a pathway to writing success in a way that made sense to them, this teaching did not promote motivation, achievement, and personal ownership of school writing.

4.3 Institutional responses (Process)

The institution responded to learners' developmental writing needs with a two-course sequence. The department offered nine ESL courses, three developmental courses, two mainstream English composition courses, and one course in creative writing, employing 10 full-time faculty. Rurality impacted the personnel teaching these courses in two ways. First, the lack of trained locals increased the need to recruit outsiders to fill these positions with none of the teachers belonging to any of the ethnic groups of the students. Second, small institutional scale dictated that all teachers were responsible for teaching more than one of the four types of English classes offered. Among these faculty, areas of specialization included ESL, English literature, and general education. None possessed expertise in teaching developmental English. Yet, most of the teachers taught at least some developmental courses. The goal of the first course of the developmental sequence, as indicated both in the official course guide as well as in teacher syllabi and in observed practice, was for students to be able to write a formal paragraph. The objective of the second course was for students to be able to write a "three-part essay" with an introduction, body, and conclusion. In practice, many teachers used the "five-paragraph essay" as a model, teaching several "types" of essays. For example, one teachers' syllabus indicated that students would write compare and contrast, expository, argumentative, and narrative essays. According to the department course guide, the overarching outcome stated for this final developmental course was for students to be able to "enter college-level English courses."

4.4 Effect of course design (Outputs)

Overall, these courses met students' needs in some ways while falling short in others. The classes were small with an average class size of 16 students. Teachers were, therefore, able to provide substantial feedback to each student about their writing as part of the writing/revision process. Discussions with teachers, observations of

classes, and examination of syllabi indicate that teachers did make the giving of feedback to students an integral part of the course, with students then revising their papers to create a final draft. This is in accord with best practices in general writing pedagogy in which teaching students the process approach to writing as opposed to writing simply as a product is embraced.

Yet, this study indicates that both the target of the courses and the methods used were less than optimal for these learners. The ultimate objective of the course sequence of which the developmental courses were part was for students to be able to compose a college-style research paper. As noted, however, college transfer was rare. Interviews indicated that most students were uninterested in university transfer with the majority wishing to complete their community college studies as preparation for the workplace. For example, several interviewees were studying law enforcement in order to pursue careers on the local police force. Also, two students in the second developmental course were already in corrections, but were majoring in law enforcement so as to secure promotions. Another wished to complete his community college degree so as to return to his island as a high school counselor. These stories were typical. Yet, the single intended outcome of the required course sequence was the writing of a traditional college research paper.

Not only this target, but the methods employed for these courses were limiting as well. The developmental writing courses were taught as simplified versions of mainstream English. Rather than embracing more up-to-date approaches such as those embracing a whole-language dimension, the developmental classes relied heavily upon a behavioral orientation. Such a stance involves breaking complex behaviors into smaller components with the goal of developing "proper" habits in the learners (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2015). In lay terms, this entails "drills" in the "fundamentals" of writing such as subject-verb agreement. For

example, in one developmental class the teacher used a worksheet in which students filled in blanks with the present, past perfect, or past progressive of a list of verbs. Even the composition of paragraphs involved a highly-formulaic approach in these courses. One teacher's course, for example, taught students to build each paragraph around the formula of starting with a "hook," transitioning to a topic sentence, followed by several sentences of support, and ending with a transition so as to set up the subsequent paragraph. While planners and practitioners still draw upon a behavioral approach as one dimension of teaching, in this case, the reliance was heavy and the approach did not best address the needs of these students. Both interviews with students as well as analysis of the local public school curriculum indicate that students already had ample experience with the techniques used in these classes. For example, the local public school curriculum indicated that between the fourth and sixth grades of elementary school, students would already be expected to succeed in proper mechanics such as subject-verb agreement, avoidance of sentence fragments, use of outside sources in writing, and creating text genres such as narrative and compare-contrast, all of which where again included in these developmental courses. Most of the students would have been exposed to the same teaching approaches and expectations for up to a decade, a fact confirmed in interviews.

Neither the official course guides, teacher syllabi, nor ground-level classroom practice used more current methods of developmental English teaching such as learning communities, cross-disciplinary approaches aimed at fostering links across the curriculum, writing assignments reflecting the needs of the workplace, or activities intended to foster a meta-awareness of genre as an aspect of writing strategies. Because of the lack of resources, extra support needed by developmental writing students was also lacking: Especially, the institution did not have a writing center with trained tutors. There was, however, a small learning center with peer tutors available, but these individuals were not trained in writing center practices.

These teachers' role as social actors was also a factor in these classes. Barnett (2011) notes the importance of "validation" for developmental and other at-risk learners. Essentially this involves authority figures, especially teachers, expressing recognition, respect, and value of the students and their efforts. The developmental teachers navigated this terrain with varying success. On the one hand, teachers made consistent efforts to get to know the students. Fieldnotes record many instances of teachers chatting informally with their students between classes, for example. Yet, the fact that none of the teachers came from the same cultural groups as the students may have had a negative impact along these lines. As cultural outsiders, teachers sometimes misinterpreted use of the local variety of English as simply representing error rather than as entailing the rule-based use of a different language variety. Although limitations of this research precluded a detailed linguistic characterization of students' Pacific English variety, I did note, for example, that the use of rules for count and non-count nouns were differed from mainstream English with words such as damage being used in a plural sense. For example, a student wrote in an essay about having to do a lot of practices in order to succeed. A metal sign in a park warned that "the monkey pod tree branches may tend to get brittle during rainy or windy weather and branches or barks may loosen and fall." In a reflection, one student wrote that "[p]roper uses or grammar and punctuations are very important if you want others to understand what you are writing." Such a phenomenon suggests that other dimensions of the language differ as well from mainstream academic English. Yet, teachers tended to consider such differences as errors attributable to poor study efforts. In an interview, for example, one teacher from outside of the English department derided the Pacific island students as "not know[ing] proper English." In a meeting to discuss learners' needs, a community leader who managed a large hotel echoed such feelings, complaining about the English of the Pacific island students. In this sense, the culture of the students was attacked with their

bilingualism, multiculturalism, and emergent bi-dialectism being ironically constructed as deficit.

5. Discussion

The goal of this research was to shed light on how the combination of an open door admission policy and rurality impacted meeting students' developmental writing needs for one Pacific island community college. Results indicate that the commitment to open admission at this college was high, yielding impressive results in terms of inclusiveness. Students were diverse in terms of place of origin, home language, academic preparation, and previous academic success. There were many non-traditional students as well as those with family and work commitments. Students were also diverse in terms of career goals. This diversity implied a variety of English learning needs: Students in different levels of courses in the ESL, developmental, or mainstream track wished to gain the English skills needed for their other courses, a variety of workplaces, or later four-year university transfer. They also needed writing instruction that made sense to them and in which they felt understood and respected. This was especially true for developmental students interviewed for this project since they had years of exposure to conventional writing instruction the purpose of which was opaque to them and the effectiveness of which was questionable. This study documented three forms of resource constraints related to rurality with impacts upon meeting these needs: Teachers were required to work beyond their core expertise, the curriculum was slender, and all teachers were cultural outsiders.

The small scale of the institution gave rise to the first two of these effects. Since the complement of English teachers was small, each was required to take on various types of courses. In this case, none of these teachers responsible for the developmental courses possessed expertise in this area. Instead, they relied upon a more traditional approach hearkening to a behavioral stance rather than embracing more innovative techniques for teaching developmental

courses. Practices such as fostering learning communities and working to build realistic, contextualized, holistic, and interesting writing opportunities employing links across the curriculum were not part of this program. Other practices applicable to this developmental population were also absent. This included no pedagogical efforts to promote genre awareness and to build skills in adapting writing to meet the needs of new genres.

The developmental curriculum was also constrained with the courses offered being strongly geared toward formal academic writing. Planners employed the lens of a traditional college-prep mission in which composing research papers represented empowerment of all learners. Notably, no courses were geared toward preparation for workplace writing tasks, although most students did not intend to transfer to four-year institutions. While a college preparatory track makes sense for those interested, an alternative track in "real-world" writing would have worked well in such a context had the resources existed to implement it. From the perspective of the learners themselves, the approach to developmental teaching used was questionable. Interviews indicated that the developmental students all had many years of experience with the same sorts of courses as these developmental ones. Coupled with this was a weak track record of engagement with and success in these traditional academic writing approaches among these students. In addition, support for students outside of class was lacking: Especially, there was no college writing center or tutors trained in writing pedagogy.

The absence of teachers who were cultural insiders was an additional shortcoming relating to rurality. As is the case in many rural settings, local talent in specialized fields such as developmental writing was scant. This lack has important implications. For example, this study provides evidence that the rules of the local variety of Pacific Island English were simply interpreted as a lack of effort, shoddy study skills, and inattention to

detail to be remedied through traditional language drills. Yet, research in linguistics is clear that language varieties have many differences, some of which may be difficult to perceive. These can be as fundamental as different discourse conventions in structuring a text with the very notion of how to tell a story differing tremendously (Daniell, 1996). The implications for writing are potent. The problem is when the variety is a low-status one as was the case here, this can lead to teachers misinterpreting these differences as reflecting a lack of effort, rebellion, or even learning disabilities on the part of the students. Indeed, the phenomenon of a local culture that differs from the mainstream, privileged culture is another dimension of rurality. A cultural insider, especially one with appropriate training in language teaching, would represent an important asset in light of this issue. Other benefits of the cultural insider include their value as a role model and their insights into learners' lives.

Yet, there were some benefits to the rural nature of the institution. Class sizes were small, and teachers often encountered the same students in subsequent classes, setting the stage for stronger relationships. Likewise, students had more opportunities to come to know each other than would have been the case in an institution with a larger campus and more course offerings. Also, although the teaching of developmental courses often devolves onto adjuncts or part-time teachers, all of the teachers involved with the developmental classes in this case were full-time faculty. Adjuncts were few at the institution since there were no other colleges in the area for such a teacher to cobble together an income.

6. Conclusion

Small, rural institutions face many challenges not encountered by their larger, urban counterparts. This struggle can be compounded by high student diversity resulting in a wide variety of educational needs that may be difficult to meet in light of resource constraints. In the case of English, successfully addressing such

needs is especially crucial given the centrality of the subject as a prerequisite for many other courses as well as the nature of the present-day world of work in which strong verbal and written skills are essential for many positions. Notable are challenges in meeting the needs of developmental English students who represent an important constituency of the community college system. This study provides evidence that the most vulnerable populations are often at the greatest risk. Also, this work suggests that greater effort should be expended by scholars in the United States to conduct high-quality studies regarding Pacific Islanders since they represent an American minority group facing great challenges, but often lacking visibility. The need for research into Pacific Island Englishes and pedagogical implications is a specific implication of this study.

This case study illustrates the conundrum implied by the combination of small institutional scale and the learner diversity inherent in the open-door community college mission in terms of personnel recruitment. In this case, a complement of ten faculty were faced with meeting the needs of hundreds of developmental, ESL, and mainstream English learners who were also diverse in terms of L1, place of origin, previous educational experiences and success, culture, age, and learning goals. In indicating the manner in which the developmental mission suffered greater impacts of scant resources, this study speaks to the keen need for optimal personnel recruitment and training. In a small-scale setting, one or two of the "right" people may considerably alter the institutional landscape. Yet, the difficulty in enticing qualified individuals can be a mitigating factor in efforts to find the desired "fit" among faculty skills, institutional needs, available resources, and faculty compensation.

At the most general level, this study demonstrates the challenges inherent in enacting the community college mission in remote, small-scale, rural settings. This work, therefore, illustrates the need for a strong commitment on the part of communities and

governments to support these institutions. This is especially important in light of rural revitalization concerns. Increases in the disparity between those with the greatest and fewest resources appear to be increasing worldwide. Given that rural dwellers bear a large share of this disparity, the rural community college is uniquely positioned to address this situation. Greater attention to these institutions as an integral component of the landscape of rurality thus has critical implications for fostering a more prosperous and just society.

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