CONCEPTUALIZING AND PLANNING FOR POST-SECONDARY STUDENT SUCCESS: MEETING THE NEEDS OF COLLEGE LEARNERS IN A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

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It's never too late to turn on the light.
~ Sharon Salzberg

ABSTRACT

The student transition into post-secondary education is complex, marked by a desire to achieve competence, establish a sense of belonging, and develop social connections. For many students, this academic and social growth happens while they establish a sense of purpose and redefine their identity. As a result, many student success initiatives exist to support the student's development and completion efforts, alongside institutional retention endeavours. One such initiative, the First Year Experience (FYE) course, was the focus of this inquiry. This case study was designed to provide qualitative insight into the experiences of faculty and students in a FYE course at a medium-sized Ontario college. Further, this inquiry sought to bring to life the complexities of supporting student persistence, while exploring how FYE courses could be re-envisioned to better meet student needs and enhance the transferability of skills. The primary research questions guiding this inquiry were: *How are FYE courses understood by the different stakeholders involved? How do first year experience courses meet the needs of first year, first semester college learners?* and *How do first year students define success?* Semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants and course material and outlines were reviewed. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing space for the research question to guide the process. The themes that emerged from the data were presented alongside the voices of participants, shedding light on faculty and student FYE course experiences. The themes were interpreted through the lens of constructivism, humanism, student developmental theory, and the research on FYE courses, student persistence, grit, and growth mindsets. Based on participants' experiences and an analysis of the data, this inquiry identified conditions to support student success that should be considered in FYE courses and other courses intended to support student success, or by institutions looking to build an ecosystem that scaffolds student success.

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CHAPTER ONE: OPENING THE DIALOGUE ABOUT FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSES

> *To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.*
>
> ~hooks (1994, p. 13)

The Topic and Research Rationale

My work as an elementary school teacher and in a community college, as both a classroom instructor and in a student support role, has provided me with insights into the student experience. I have been entrusted with the stories of the students I support, and as a result, I have gained a deep appreciation of the obstacles they face, and the real and perceived barriers that stand in their way. I have learned for many, higher education holds the promise of self-improvement, transformation, and the attainment of an important life milestone. I see the hope in students' eyes everyday as they work to persist against all obstacles, many clinging to their deeply-rooted desire to be successful, unaware of the normalcy of their struggle. My time in student services has shown me that student success is a complex and multi-faceted issue that is often best supported when the institution offers students the tools and scaffolding required for college completion. In addition to these experiences, I have also witnessed polarizing conversations about student success that reveal an ongoing dialogue about the degree to which institutions are responsible for supporting students, and if so, how this is best achieved.

Situating Myself as Researcher

First and foremost, I professionally identify as a student affairs professional. I have held various roles in student success where I strike a delicate balance between meeting the mandate of

the institution and the students I serve. In reality, helping students to achieve their dreams does not always translate into college completion. Informed by my work in special education and my role in student affairs, I aim to stay in service to students. I recognize what students need to be successful is not always what is best for the institution, nor may their needs be what I perceive. Rather, my practice involves asking a lot of questions, helping students uncover their needs and supporting their development of self-awareness and metacognition. In these roles, I have been responsible for instruction in academic skills and learning strategies, part of which involved authentic conversations with students about learning and academic success, and teaching and modelling the skills required for success in higher education such as time management, breaking down assignments, reading comprehension, studying, skills for test taking, academic writing, and even the application of higher order thinking to improve students' ability to think about learning as an active, rather than passive process. My work with students has affirmed what is discussed in the literature: in addition to academic skills, the acquisition of affective or non-cognitive skills required to achieve a sense of belonging has a powerful effect on students' ability to succeed (Andreatta, 1998; Barefoot, Griffen, & Koch, 2012; Choate & Smith; 2003; Tinto, 1993). The courageous and daring students I support prove time and time again what I have come to know about learning, revealing with the right tools and the support of a caring educational professional, students are better positioned to achieve academic success.

As a student affairs professional, my goal has always been to equip students with the academic and social skills they need to be successful in post-secondary education and to help them understand the efficacy of these skills in relation to their area of study. My previous experience as an elementary teacher, particularly supporting students with unique learning needs, instilled in me a deep appreciation for the power of learning how to learn. I learned much like a

carpenter, a tool is only as useful as one's belief in its purpose, an ability to use it, and the degree to which it yields a successful end product. In my experience, as students slowly build their toolbox of academic skills, their confidence in, and ability to learn, increases despite the fact the content becomes more challenging as the program progresses. As we navigate this process together, I support not only the academic skill development of students, but also their affective development, encouraging them to form social connections, navigating the emotional transition into this new life chapter and developing a sense of purpose as they begin to envision their future selves. In my experience, this work is most successful when trust is well-established and maintained.

Although a one-on-one environment provides ideal conditions to support students' holistic development, my experiences have shown the classroom holds great potential as a place where holistic development can be nurtured, and academic skills taught. These beliefs and experiences extend into the classes I teach and the work I do with faculty to support the exploration of pedagogical and instructional approaches that foster student success in First Year Experience (FYE) courses, and student development of academic and non-cognitive skills within the context of course content (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). This inquiry is evidence of my commitment to continued conversations about student retention and to evolving how students are supported, within the classroom and beyond. My experience and understanding as a teacher and student affairs professional on how post-secondary student success is supported within a college environment, is instrumental to my identity and my role as researcher.

My Beliefs and Assumptions as Researcher

What I believe to be true about teaching, learning, and education has undoubtedly been shaped over time by my experiences as a student, teacher, and student affairs professional. As a

researcher, I have sought to befriend myself and my lived experience through critical self-reflection and a purposeful commitment to awakening self-awareness. Through the telling of my own confessional tale in my research journal, I distinguish my voice from that of my participants. Part of this journey prompted me to revisit my own experiences in teaching, learning, and education with the curiosity of a researcher, leading me toward new ways of knowing, doing, and being.

My early career as an elementary school teacher granted me the opportunity to gain an emic perspective of students as learners, and as a result, a unique appreciation for how learning happens, the vulnerability inherent in learning, the power of a classroom and teacher to make learning limitless, and the ability of the very same system to be a student's greatest barrier, standing in the way of their true human potential. I encountered students who knew of their brilliance, and others who were overpowered by their shortcomings. I marvelled at the way students defied the diagnoses that stood between them and their potential. I gained an appreciation for the power and influence of a teacher, not to teach concepts, but to inspire students to embody the character of a learner. Through this experience, I developed the belief that the academic fate of a student is malleable, and I was excited by the potential of educational institutions and professionals to influence a student's trajectory. My research journal documents the following exploration of what I believe to be true:

> I put this experience to work in my role as a learning strategist in the community college system, where I worked to support students in their quest for success. As I bridged into the classroom and began teaching post-secondary, I realized my pedagogical and instructional approaches were influenced by what I believed to be true, informed by the

many stories shared by the students I supported. What I believe to be true is informed by these experiences, and in essence, is my confessional tale. I believe:

- Faculty and student affairs staff influence student success (these interactions can augment success, stall, or halt success).
- Each student experiences the college environment in their own unique way. It's an intersection of variables including identity, outlook, skills, access to resources, and environment.
- Institutional definitions of student success can be problematic, valuing college completion over a student's self-actualization or goal clarity (for example, withdrawing from a program or transferring into a different program of study can sometimes bring a student closer to goal attainment).
- Faculty's pedagogical and instructional approaches are informed by their own experiences in education, and who they think their students might be. An empathetic, rather than sympathetic connection to students' struggles and challenges might transform these approaches.
- A student's GPA upon entry or "intellectual ability" does not necessarily predict their academic fate.
- Based on what students have shared, faculty teaching the FYE course may be teaching the content as hypothetical.
- Instructional approaches to teaching the FYE course are likely varied – dependent on the educational and professional experience of the course faculty.

(Research Journal, January 2, 2018)

These beliefs are so deeply rooted in my ways of knowing and doing, that they cannot be teased apart from my identity as the researcher of this inquiry. To identify as objective would feel unethical. Rather, it is my hope through confessing how I entered this research, readers will be able to hear how and where my voice enters this story, whether it is early on in my theoretical framework and literature, as I gather, represent, and make sense of data, or as I discuss implications and recommendations, the fulsome result of the stories of both the participants and my "posterior view" (Freire, 1997, p. 38) of how student success can be conceptualized and supported in the context of the FYE course.

Purpose of the Inquiry and Research Questions

The focus of this inquiry is the FYE course, a commonly used student success strategy that continues to be packaged in new and different ways. FYE courses aim to equip students with the tools they need to be successful in their first year of study and beyond. As will be shown in the literature review that follows, an overwhelming amount of evidence suggests that thoughtful and well-planned proactive student supports such as the FYE course positively impact the student experience (Braxton et al., 2013; Carter & Yeo, 2016; Grayson et al., 2019; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft et al., 2005). As college campuses continue to diversify with increasing non-traditional student populations, such as non-direct, mature, and international, worries about student preparedness continue to grow among educators and campus communities (Grayson et al., 2019). From an equity perspective, supporting all students in achieving success is a timely and relevant quest, as such strategies to better equip students for success continue to be of prime focus for many institutions.

Most FYE courses aim to build students' academic skills and support their affective or non-cognitive development in tandem. Tuckman and Kennedy (2011) suggest that the explicit

instruction of learning how to learn holds the potential to improve student success. FYE courses commonly support students development of time management skills and provide explicit instruction in metacognitive skills, including reading comprehension, note-taking, test preparation techniques, and test-taking strategies (Wernersbach, et al., 2014). Mounting research (Cone & Owens, 1991; Hattie et al., 1996; O'Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009; Wernersbach et al., 2014) demonstrates post-secondary courses that include study skills instruction, result in improved academic success, retention, and self-efficacy. As such, supporting students' academic skill development appears to be one of the key aims of the FYE course. The FYE course also works to build students social connectivity, promote wellness, and encourage their involvement on campus (Choate & Smith, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Built on the notion that students who develop a sense of belonging by engaging with campus life are more likely to be retained, most notably because of the positive effect on their affective growth and development (O'Keeffe, 2013; Tinto, 1993, 2012), FYE courses typically strive to support students' social integration.

Porter and Swing (2006) suggest FYE courses often serve as a type of "insurance" (p. 106) that all students are provided certain information and skills to support their transition into higher education. The extant research reveals the FYE course has positive effects on student persistence, retention or graduation rates, academic success or grade-point average (GPA), and student satisfaction (Andreatta, 1998; Barton & Donahue, 2009; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Cuseo, 1991; Jamelske, 2009; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Porter & Swing, 2006; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Vander Schee, 2011; Weisgerber, 2005; Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989; Yale, 1999).

The literature on FYE courses is vast (Braxton, Doyle, & Jones, 2013; Carter & Yeo, 2016; Grayson, Côté, Chen, Kenedy, & Roberts, 2019; Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; 2012), but very few studies have qualitatively given voice to both the faculty and student experience. Based on my prior practice as a Learning Strategist, a teacher of the FYE course, and a review of the literature on student success courses, there appears to be a consensus suggesting such courses are effective, often measuring efficacy as persistence or continuation in a program of study. This quantitative measure however, does little to support the efficacy of an individual course and provides little insight into faculty and student FYE course experiences (Pascarella, 2001; Tuckman & Kennedy, 2011). Further, very little research exists to provide insight into how students in Ontario College programs define success, and as a result, what they need from their FYE courses. As well, in my experience I have found FYE faculty have little to no opportunity, space, or support to engage with a definition of student success or to conceptualize the types of tools students need to be successful. This inquiry; therefore, aims to fill these gaps by broadening the knowledge base about FYE courses through the perspectives of faculty and students, offering insights into how such courses can be re-envisioned to suit the needs of those involved.

FYE courses vary in their goals and outcomes depending on location, type of institution, status as voluntary or mandatory, and whether they are credit-bearing. FYE courses are commonly offered in the first semester with the intent of supporting students as they transition into post-secondary education, equipping them with the cognitive and academic skills required for success, in particular, teaching students how to learn and/or how to succeed in their program of study (Ahadi, Pedri, & Nichols, 2019; Grayson, et al., 2019).

This research inquiry aims to unearth the inside perspectives of a three-credit FYE course in a certificate program at a medium-sized Ontario college, exploring how it contributes to the first-year student experience. Given the fact FYE courses are a relied upon student success initiative, the current inquiry provides much needed qualitative insight into how FYE courses are experienced and understood by faculty and students, and how they might be re-envisioned to better and more sustainably meet student needs and enhance transferability of skills.

General research questions include the following:

- *How are FYE courses understood by the different stakeholders involved?*
- *How do first year experience courses meet the needs of first year, first semester college learners?*
- *How do first year students define success?*

Sub-questions include, but are not limited to the following, differentiated for faculty and students.

Faculty

- What do faculty understand to be the goal of FYE courses?
- How do these understandings influence their pedagogical and instructional approaches?
- How might student affairs professionals scaffold faculty in the process of teaching from a lens of student success, informed by the lived experiences and goals of students?

Students

- How do first-year college students define success?
- How, and to what extent, does participation in a first-year experience (FYE) course influence students' self-defined notion of success?

- Are students able to transfer the skills they learn in their success course to their other courses?

My Theoretical Framework

My identity as a feminist and activist propels me to use an approach rooted in emancipation, empowerment, and equity and advocates for education as growth and transformation. This inquiry therefore, draws on both critical and feminist theory, as well as, constructivist and humanistic theory within the context of student development theory and the psycho-social and developmental needs of the college learner. This theoretical eclecticism allows for the use of theories that complement one another in an effort to move beyond the cognitive needs of students to embrace holistic development. These theories, when used together, reveal greater insight into the FYE course phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and affirm my belief that education holds the power to be transformative, and that learning and teaching require courage and a context honouring individual difference and dignity.

Critical and Feminist Theory

Engaging in the process of becoming. Critical and feminist theory calls us to return to our core values as human beings. Amidst rapid social change there exists a deeply-rooted desire to be good and to do good (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2000). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) discusses the importance of problem-posing education, arguing it "affirms men and women as being in the process of *becoming*–as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (p. 72). The applications of problem-posing education, as described by Freire are two-fold. First, they encourage me as a doctoral student and researcher to become comfortable not knowing. Second, they ask me to examine my values, beliefs, and assumptions in relation to my work with students, my research, and my world.

Throughout my doctoral coursework and inspired by a critical friend, I began to engage in a process of critical self-reflection, by which my student affairs and teaching practice became the subject of my own inquiry; moving from what Freire (1998) termed ingenuous curiosity to epistemological curiosity, I was guided by my movement from "doing" to "reflecting on doing." Freire (1998) states:

> It's really not possible for someone to imagine himself/herself as a subject in the process of becoming without having at the same time a disposition for change. And change of which she/he is not merely the victim but the subject. (p. 44)

Freire eloquently explains consciousness itself does not produce change, but rather change is inspired through the reflective process. Through reflection on our encounters with teaching faculty and students, our own teaching practices, and the skills and abilities of students in FYE courses, my critical friend and I became the subject of these reflections, envisioning new and better ways of supporting student learning within the context of their post-secondary courses, including the FYE course.

Through personal reflection I learned learning how to learn is best applied when it is meaningful to students and transferable to other more challenging courses. Freire (1970) believes by making education meaningful for both teachers and pupils, learning is enhanced and as a result, students are more likely to persist. I believe this same principle can be applied within the context of the FYE course, thus revealing the potential for enhanced meaning for both students and faculty. Although the learning goals of an FYE course are not necessarily grounded in a critical consciousness, many courses appear to embed elements of critical self-reflection at a critical time when new identities are being born and developed. Freire articulates the importance of understanding one's social reality, arguing this knowledge has the potential to raise

consciousness, which is foundational to action. Freire asserts through *conscientização* (p. 61) (conscious raising education), understanding can be awakened, allowing the process of learning to move beyond engagement and retention, to be and mean more. FYE courses aim to support the growth and development of the learner. In my opinion, critical consciousness and an understanding of one's social reality is key to developing this sense of identity. The forces of power and oppression at play in society can either be affirmed or enforced in the learning experience; or through *conscientização*, praxis can be scaffolded, inviting learners to reflect on their social reality and take action, while forming their new identities as post-secondary students.

At the outset of this inquiry, I wondered if a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all FYE curriculum overlooked and perhaps neglected the actual needs of the learners, marginalizing the diverse students in today's college classrooms. Freire's focus on critical thinking, collective and self-identity, cooperation, and democracy extend knowing beyond the individual and move the vision of education to one of networking, whereby the learner creates a community of knowledge (Freire, 1970, 1993; Freire & Faundez, 1989). In one-on-one learning strategy counselling sessions, I have witnessed the awakening of consciousness when individual student's struggles are normalized, their personal life circumstances considered, and when these students develop self-advocacy skills. I believe a shift toward emergent curriculum and FYE courses based on the real-needs of learners has the potential to be more meaningful, thus improving student engagement in the course and through the process, scaffolding the development of self-identity, awareness, cooperation, and democracy.

Questioning. Freire (1970) is critical of those who approached issues or challenges with answers rather than questions. He argues for dialogical relationships between teachers and learners where both "become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p. 67). I

believe his understanding is built on the dialectical process of questioning, discussing, and evolving understanding, known as the Socratic Method. This method, as evidenced by Socrates' questions to Meno (Plato, 1892/1920/1937), suggests critical thinking is stimulated through the questioning process, which ultimately leads to exploration and discovery (Noddings, 2007).

This inquiry is prompted by my curiosity, but even more importantly, by my observations and the questions I ask students to help them get to the essence of their post-secondary struggles. Professionally, I have been immersed in a continual and recursive spiral of questioning, planning alongside students or faculty, and then reflecting. By asking questions, I deepen my understanding and more importantly, I unearth a deeper sense of curiosity (Brookfield, 1987), what Freire (1997) refers to as a "constitutive path to curiosity" (p. 31). This allows me to meet students where they are (Hunter & Korpatnicki, 2014). I believe using students' skills, abilities, and strengths as a springboard to learning is essential to honouring them as human beings. Such problem-posing practices lead to education that is with students, rather than on or for students, and reflect the student-centred approaches that align most closely with what I believe to be true.

Transcending experience. Inherent in this critical approach is my desire for my research to be for and with people, rather than on or of people. Sociologist and feminist Dorothy Smith (2005) uses feminist standpoint theory in her work, building a sociology for women, later referred to as a sociology for the people; feminist standpoint theory

> …creates a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society or political economy. It is a method of inquiry that works from the actualities of people's everyday lives and experience to discover the social as it extends beyond experience. (p. 10)

These views embody my desire to begin with my own experience as a student, student affairs practitioner, and teacher, and also prompts a depth and richness I believe will only be uncovered by moving beyond experience. Smith (2005) urges us to use our embodied standpoint to transcend the experiences a discourse will not speak. Bringing my own standpoint and voice to my work will allow me to do just this; to make meaning out of an intricate reality, one for which words alone cannot always describe. I believe Smith's work, when combined with Freire's (1970) *conscientização,* provides a framework within which authentic meaning-making can occur.

On behalf of feminism. For this inquiry to be meaningful and expressive of my truth and my identity as a feminist, I am drawn to feminist ways of knowing, doing, and being. Like Freire (1970), hooks (1994) advocates the quest for critical consciousness must be continuous, and knowledge cannot be taken for granted as known, but rather purposefully enacted, whereby, research can work to empower or can act as an extension of oppression. By weaving feminist thinking throughout my work, I hope to not only honour this valuable knowledge, but also disseminate its truth.

I first accessed critical thinking through sociological and feminist theory in a high-school family sociology class. My teacher theoretically explained male-violence, poverty, and gendered oppression. For the first time, someone elucidated what I had experienced while growing up. In an instant, feminist theory normalized my experience; as hooks (2000) would say, I was "politically awakened" (p. 21). I felt great power in knowing my experience was part of something bigger–patriarchy–and in embracing my standpoint and fighting for women's rights, I had the potential to influence how others experienced male-privilege (Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 1998). hooks (2000) states in order to sunset patriarchy (also known as institutionalized sexism),

we must move beyond our patriarchal ways of knowing, doing, and being, replacing our thinking with feminist thought and action. Feminism influences my many identities as a woman, spouse, mother, and teacher; undoubtedly, this intersectionality influences the way I approach my work with students and this research project. It is also important for me to acknowledge my own feminist beliefs inform my approach with students, but do not necessarily constitute the right way. Rather, my participants have revealed, and will continue to reveal, other equally valid ways of supporting student learning in the context of a FYE course.

Informed by feminist theory, my research project is built on the ethics of mutuality and interdependence, recognizing "feminist thinking offers us a way to end domination, while simultaneously changing the impact of inequality" (hooks, 2000, p. 117). I acknowledge my privilege as a researcher and credit critical and feminist theory as anchors, prompting me to question my values, assumptions, and beliefs throughout the process. As hooks (2000) reminds researchers, "there may be times when all is not equal, but the consequence of that inequality will not be subordination, colonization, and dehumanization" (p. 117).

A note about gender-neutral language. In an effort to bring voice to my participants in a way that aligns with my feminist roots, I have chosen to use non-gendered pronouns throughout the presentation of my research findings, mainly through the use of "they", "them," and "theirs" (APA, 2019, p. 140). My reasoning for this is two-fold. First, participants were not asked their preferred gender pronouns at the time of the interview. Ansara and Hegarty (2013) argue it is not within the scope of a researcher to determine participants' genders, cautioning names do not correspond to gender, and that gender binaries exclude those who identify outside this historic divide. They suggest "[t]he widespread practice of determining other people's

genders without their explicit agreement is an effect for which we advise non-cisgenderist researchers to require explanation" (p. 173).

Second, the most recent 2020 7th Edition Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) cautions against assuming cisgendered identities; instead, APA suggests when gendered identities are unknown, the use of they, them, and theirs is most appropriate. The APA Manual (2020) explains the use of the pronoun "they" has the power to "reduce bias in the way that readers perceive the individuals referred to in the text and thereby helps ensure that readers do not feel ostracized by that text" (p. 140).

For the purpose of this research discussion, I believe sex and gender is irrelevant. I anticipate gender-neutral language may invite readers to listen to the experiences of participants in ways that might support them in suspending judgment of gendered ways of knowing and doing. In addition to aligning with my feminist worldview, gender neutrality adds an extra layer of anonymity to a relatively small number of participants in a medium-sized Ontario college.

Constructivist and Humanistic Theory

During my teacher training constructivism was not a theory, but rather a metaphor for learning. Having experienced a wealth of play-based learning, including Montessori education as a child, constructivism named and explained what I knew to be true. Being a parent and a teacher has evolved my understanding of learning as active, socially constructed, and personally meaningful. I believe students compensate for perceived needs or challenges on a daily basis, overcoming socially constructed barriers with their perseverance, largely fuelled by their passion, interest, engagement, and ability to construct and make meaning.

My understanding of constructivism is informed by John Dewey (1916; 1938/1997), Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1952, 1964, 1970), and Lev Vygotsky (1978) who share the view that learning is

active and knowledge is constructed and socially influenced. Constructivism is not without critique and the claims it makes are viewed by some as one-sided, misleading and/or binary (Fosnot, 1996; Fox, 2001; Phillips, 1995). Not all faculty in higher education are well-versed in learning theory and some may have conflicting understandings of how learning happens. For me, it is when constructivism meets humanistic approaches that I better understand the range of instructional and pedagogical approaches employed by faculty in their delivery of an FYE course. Constructivism might also shed light on the student experience and how students make meaning of their experience in an FYE course.

Dewey. The work of John Dewey (1916; 1938/1997) informs my understanding of constructivism, arguing although all great learning comes from experience, not all learning experiences are "genuinely or equally educative" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 25). This theory of experience provides great insight into the phenomenon of student engagement. Dewey explains positive and more neutral or unenjoyable experiences have both the potential to "narrow the field of further experience" (p. 26) by producing a lack of responsiveness and/or a slack, or careless attitude. Dewey believed education is never void of experience, but rather certain types of experiences can "prevent a person from getting out of them what they have to give" (p. 26). This experiential continuum is a stark reminder that the FYE course as an experience is not enough, but rather "everything depends on the quality of the experience which is had" (p. 27).

How students make meaning of an FYE course is rooted in the perceived purpose of the course, how the course is taught, and the value of the course in meeting their needs. Dewey (1938/1997) affirms the importance of purpose:

> There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes

> which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (p. 67)

Dewey (1916; 1938/1997) reiterates the importance of students as active agents in defining the purpose of learning. In addition, Dewey argues learning must build upon prior learning to spark engagement (his principle of continuity), giving birth to the common phrase "meeting students where they are at," a current evidence based-practice in student affairs work in higher education, and strong support for emergent curriculum that responds to students' real needs. Dewey's explanation of purpose has inspired me to think about how success is defined institutionally and to build into my research, the opportunity for students to guide how success is both measured and supported within the context of the FYE course.

Piaget. The work of Jean Piaget (1952) provides great insight into the power of a student's environment to influence and support learning. In Piaget's *Theories of Intelligence*, the concepts of assimilation and accommodation are used to explain how learning occurs. Piaget theorizes during the cognitive process of assimilation, a learner takes in new information and works to organize it within their existing knowledge, often resulting in a state of disequilibrium. The learner's quest for equilibrium results in the accommodation of new ways of knowing and doing.

Piaget's (1952) theory of intellectual adaptation speaks to the influence of a learner's environment on internal ways of knowing, doing, and being, suggesting the potential of an ecosystem that scaffolds and supports student acquisition of academic and non-cognitive skills to influence success outcomes. The process of intellectual adaptation is synonymous with growth and informs my understanding of the importance of supporting students' transition into post-

secondary, particularly in the context of the classroom. Furthermore, the conceptualization of intellectual adaptation describes the challenge inherent in the student transition. Piaget describes learners as in a state of constant adaptation, fluxing between the comfort of knowing (equilibrium), and the uncomfortable state of not knowing (disequilibrium), normalizing the ebb and flow of the student experience. Of most importance, this understanding of disequilibrium, as informed by Piaget (1952; 1964; 1970), provides insight into how students experience their transition into a new learning environment; in this case, the post-secondary classroom, and, how an inability to achieve equilibrium can interfere with students' growth, development, and learning. This conceptualization also suggests learners' innate desire to achieve equilibrium can be fostered by a supportive learning environment, suggesting that supports such as the FYE course hold the potential to make learning possible for all students. Piaget's humanistic and constructivist standpoint on learning can be applied not only to the student transition, but also to faculty as they adapt to changing student needs, new teaching experiences, and curricula, and for newer faculty, their own transition into teaching in higher education.

Vygotsky. The work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) explores the role of social interaction and cultural context on the development of human cognition, arguing social learning precedes development. Using Vygotsky's theory of social development, we can examine the degree to which learning is socially enacted and the extent to which the culture of higher education affects cognitive and affective development. Vygotsky used the term "zone of proximal development" (p. 82) to explain the learning potential that can be leveraged through scaffolding. Vygotsky believes in the power of the more knowledgeable other and their ability to influence learning. The zone of proximal development reveals what a learner can do independently, explained as their actual level of development, and what they can do with assistance or scaffolding from

others, known as their proximal level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). I believe FYE courses can act as a scaffold for learning that might take place at other times and in other contexts. In addition, the FYE course might provide an environment where students can engage with their peers, the more knowledgeable other, to achieve equilibrium.

Definition of Key Terms

First Year Experience courses (FYE), are those that take place within the context of a course, typically offered in the first semester (Porter & Swing, 2006). The literature, particularly American literature, makes reference to these courses as Freshman Courses, or First Year Seminars (FYS). FYE courses are further detailed in Chapter Two.

Student Affairs refers to the organizational structure of higher education that deals with the student experience, typically understood as the non-academic experience, or student services. Student affairs most often encompasses library services, athletics, housing and residence, academic support, health, wellness, and counseling (CACUSS, 2020). Student conduct tends to often bridge the two, especially with heightened awareness about academic integrity, and a decrease in students living on campus. The co-curriculum or co-curricular learning, refers to opportunities created by the institution to support student growth and development, happening alongside the academic curriculum. Although all institutions define their own co-curricular learning, common examples include student leadership, athletic involvement, peer-to-peer support programs, clubs and activities, and on-campus volunteerism. Co-curricular transcripts (CCRs), also referred to as student development records (SDRs) are increasingly popular as a means to capture student involvement. Although CCRs and SDRs are not a focus of this inquiry, the very emergence of them reaffirms the timeliness of this inquiry, reflecting growing institutional understandings of the importance of supporting holistic and affective development.

Learning Skills Interventions have been described by Hattie, Biggs, and Purdie (1996) as supports, "aimed at enhancing motivation, mnemonic skills, self-regulation, study-related skills such as time management, and even general ability itself: creating positive attitudes toward both content and context: and minimizing learning pathologies" (p. 99-100). Used interchangeably with learning strategies, these skills, at their very essence, are the building blocks of meta-cognition, teaching students how to learn.

Navigating the Dissertation

In this opening chapter, I introduced the current research inquiry, explaining the heightened institutional awareness about student persistence and retention efforts (Braxton et al., 2013; Carter & Yeo, 2016; Grayson, et al., 2019; Habley et al., 2012; Tinto, 1993; 2012) and situating FYE courses as a commonly relied upon retention initiative to improve student persistence through the first semester and beyond. I provided an overview of the purpose of the inquiry, and detailed the research questions that guide this inquiry into how student success is understood and conceptualized in the context of an FYE course by both faculty and students. My professional and personal identities were contextualized within the theoretical discourses informing my worldview, including a description of how critical, feminist, constructivist, and humanist theories are woven deeply into my being as teacher, student affairs professional, and researcher. Lastly, I defined the key terms used throughout this research inquiry.

In **Chapter Two**, I explore student persistence literature within the context of student development theory in order to understand the FYE course experience, and provide an overview of the curricular and pedagogical approaches to FYE courses.

In **Chapter Three**, I trace my epistemological and methodological approach back to my identity as a feminist, and situate my role of teacher and student affairs professional in

constructivism. Here, I explain how and why qualitative methodology unearths the emic perspectives of my participants, and further, how this intrinsic case-study used ethnographic-like methods to retell authentic accounts. I elaborate on the methods of this inquiry, including participant selection, data collection, and analysis. Chapter Three concludes with an overview of the ethical considerations, including how the tenets of mindfulness entered into my research practice.

In **Chapter Four**, I present the findings of this inquiry, bringing to light first, the voices of faculty and their experiences and understandings of the first-year experience course, and second, the voices of students and their experiences and understandings of the FYE course.

In **Chapter Five**, I offer an interpretation of the data, grounding my participants' understandings and experiences in the related theory and literature, beginning to paint a picture of the challenges and resultant opportunities inherent in the FYE course experience

In **Chapter Six,** true to my ontological commitment to empower and enact change, I share the implications of this work, and conclude with recommendations to influence practice and evolve the faculty and student experience in new directions.

Closing Remarks

It is my hope this research reveals a richer and more emic perspective of the FYE course, complementing what is already quantitatively known about FYE courses. The ultimate goal of this research is to improve the student experience. This research inquiry emerged out of my desire to better understand the FYE course experience, by engaging those closest to the experience–faculty and students. It is my hope the experiences and understandings unearthed in this inquiry will support faculty in re-envisioning their curricular and pedagogical practices, and

offer administrators a glimpse into the course experience from both the faculty and student perspectives.

CHAPTER TWO: A MULTI-FACETED VIEW OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT, STUDENT PERSISTENCE, AND STUDENT SUCCESS

> *Test scores and measures of achievement tell you where a student is, but they don't tell you where a student could end up.*
>
> ~Carol S. Dweck (2006, p. 66)

Introductory Remarks

Students arrive in post-secondary education with different skills, abilities, and a varying level of preparedness for the academic and social demands that may be encountered. Most post-secondary institutions have an array of initiatives to support students' academic and non-academic growth and development, many intended to improve student success. A decline in the number of students, increased competition, and growing post-secondary offerings, have heightened institutional awareness of the student experience, persistence, and retention efforts and associated benefits, including revenue (Braxton et al., 2013; Cruise & Wade, 2016; Farhan, 2017; Habley et al., 2012; O'Keefe, 2013; Tinto, 1993; 2012). Student retention is a complex and multi-faceted issue driving many institutional decisions and initiatives, particularly as they relate to supporting first-year students as they transition into and through higher education. It is no surprise then that student retention has become one of the most researched topics in higher education (Jamelske, 2009).

Post-secondary institutions experience high rates of student attrition during the first year, making it a key time for institutional intervention and support (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, & Nordström, 2009). First year experience (FYE) courses, the subject of this inquiry, are one commonly relied-upon support to acculturate students to the demands of higher education, thought to help them gain the tools needed to thrive, as well as to improve retention through first

semester and beyond. The research overwhelmingly suggests thoughtful and well-planned proactive student supports such as FYE courses have the potential to positively impact the student experience (Braxton et al., 2013; Carter & Yeo, 2016; Grayson et al., 2019; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Upcraft et al., 2005).

Faculty understandings of FYE courses, their curricular goals, and the student experience are paramount to revisioning pedagogical and instructional approaches, thus improving the student experience. Given that FYE courses are a commonly relied upon tool to support students' transition into post-secondary (Ahadi et al., 2019), and the first semester student experience can directly affect persistence (Braxton et al., 2013; Tinto, 2006), students' voices are also critical to the educational discourse informing FYE courses.

Guided by the research questions and an intent to contribute to the ongoing evolution of FYE courses in order to better serve students, this chapter situates the FYE course within the persistence and student development literature; explores the FYE course phenomenon with a focus on the different course types, the most common curricular goals, the efficacy of FYE courses as measured by GPA, persistence, and student satisfaction; and discusses the pedagogical and instructional approaches of FYE courses. It is anticipated readers will develop a better understanding of the intent and purpose of FYE courses, their potential to support students as they transition into and through post-secondary, and the importance of making space for faculty to share their understandings and challenges, while bringing students' voices to the forefront.

Retention, Persistence, and Attrition as Measures of Student Success

Retention, persistence, and attrition are commonly used measures indicating whether a student has remained on a full-time continuous journey from the point of entry to the completion of their degree (Braxton et al., 2013; Finnie, Childs, & Qui, 2012; Grayson et al., 2019; Habley

et al., 2012). Retention and persistence have often been viewed as synonymous with grit and success, implying to be successful, one must remain enrolled in higher education and earn a degree or diploma (Barton & Donahue, 2009; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Demirian, 2010; Habley et al., 2012; Porter & Swing, 2006; Tinto, 2006-2007; 2012). In reality, persistence is difficult to measure because it is difficult to track students who have transferred into other programs within and across institutions; difficult to trace students who have completed their certificate, diploma, or degree over a longer stretch of time; and/or for students for whom success is not marked by program completion, but the achievement of a goal such as retraining, gaining employment, and/or transitioning into a different pathway fulfills their self-defined notion of success (Finnie et al., 2012; Habley et al., 2012). Although not peer reviewed, Finnie et al.'s (2012) report on patterns of persistence in Ontario suggest the inability to account for mobility across institutions leads to an underestimation of retention. Although this inquiry is not focused on how FYE courses support institutional persistence, it is important to begin with what is known about persistence, particularly given the overwhelming amount of research on FYE courses measuring the efficacy in relation to student persistence, as measured by enhanced student success, and to help lay a foundation upon which many retention strategies have been built.

Many persistence and retention researchers have drawn attention to the interpersonal environment, and its ripple effect on student persistence. Panos and Astin (1968) found students were most likely to complete four years of post-secondary in an institution, where peer-to-peer relationships were characterized by cohesiveness, cooperativeness, and independence, emphasizing the importance of student involvement and social connectedness. Building on this work, retention theorist Tinto (1993) originally theorized about attrition in his book *Leaving College*: *Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, using Emile Durkheim's

theoretical work on suicide to develop a theory of departure. Tinto argued students who become socially connected were less likely to depart. The literature on persistence in higher education had been historically binary, placing the responsibility to connect with either the student or the institution (Habley et al., 2012). By stating, "institutions retain students and students persist," Hagedorn (2005, p. 92) exposes the space between retention and persistence, whereby institutions and students can begin to work together to augment success. Tinto (1993) had earlier suggested supporting the social and intellectual growth of students would naturally lead to improved student retention. In later research, Tinto (2012), asserted institutions can create conditions for student success by supporting students' social engagement through initiatives such as orientation, on-campus activities such as athletics and campus living, and, through curricular opportunities such as FYE courses. In essence, Tinto (2012) draws attention to the institution's responsibility to support student engagement and build a repository of tools to support social and academic success, and ultimately the overall goals of the institution.

Panos and Astin (1968) extend the conversation beyond student connectivity to begin to illuminate the ways the classroom and faculty can offer experiences of connection. They suggest students are less likely to drop out when faculty are personally involved, and when there is a high degree of familiarity with instructors. Similarly, Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975) both emphasize the importance of interpersonal connection on social and academic integration, suggesting student's connection to their faculty positively influences their institutional commitment. Pascarella (1980) builds on this understanding to form a student-faculty informal contact model suggesting informal contact between students and their faculty has a range of persistence supporting effects on factors such as students career plans and educational aspirations to academic achievement and college persistence.

Bean and Metzner (1985) examined the non-traditional student, including students who commuted to and from campus, mature students, and those studying part-time to begin to reveal that environmental factors are more likely to support their persistence than the social connectedness factors that impact the more traditional student. Building on and integrating the work of Panos and Astin (1968), Spady (1971), Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985) Cabera, Nora and Castaneda's (1993) integrated model of student retention provides a more fulsome model to begin to explain and make meaning out of institutional attrition and persistence. Cabera, Nora and Castaneda's (1993) caution that the patterns underlying student persistence are unique and vary based on varying factors such as the type of institution and the composition of student enrollment.

A whole campus approach is supported in the literature; for example, Zepke (2015) argues traditional views of student engagement are insufficient and too narrow in scope, and instead, argues for a more holistic "critical sociocultural ecological perspective" (p. 1312). Zepke's approach is grounded in four assumptions: 1) student engagement occurs in a specific ideological climate; 2) engagement research produces generic indicators of success must be questioned; 3) student engagement is situated within an ecology of social relations; and 4) critical holistic engagement research occupies a different pragmatic space, one that is emancipatory. Tinto's (1993; 2012) theory of student departure, Zepke's (2015) critical sociocultural ecological perspective, and the research that follows, suggest there is a need to build an ecosystem to support student engagement, one where the effects of student success initiatives are maximized through their connection to other programs and whole campus initiatives (Barefoot, 2000; Zepke, 2015).

The Waves of Student Developmental Theory

The view of the whole person engaged affectively and cognitively in the experience of learning is rudimentary to theories of student development, and thus to the success of FYE courses. From the many theories informing our understanding of teaching and learning have emerged theories unique to the developmental processes and experiences of the post-secondary student. Although traditional student development theories are varied, dated, and lack research on first-generation students, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and other marginalized student groups, threaded through all the research is the theme of identity construction and identity development (Erikson, 1959/1994, Chickering, 1972; Holland, 1997; Piaget, 1952, 1964, 1969; Perry, 1968; Kohlberg, 1981; Scholssberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), affirming the importance of the affective domain in the development of the post-secondary learner. Student development theories encompass three main components. As Dr. Arnold (personal communication, September 17, 2020) succinctly states,

> First, student development theories focus on individuals and individual change. The growing diversity of students in post-secondary education has fostered the creation and refinement of student development theories over the past four decades. Second, many theories posit the continuum of dependence and interdependence to autonomy. For example, the movement from loco parentis (instead of parent role) to the student development role (treating students as adults) has been one such evolution on this component. Third, finding the 'right' balance between challenges to the student with the provision of support in the learning environment is another key component. That is, to what extent does student affairs/services provide enough support to address particular challenges which students can, despite a struggle, grow and move on to accomplish other

tasks. The critical student affairs/services skill is to find a balance between under and over challenging students.

Adopting the feminist metaphor of waves to describe student development theory, Jones and Stewart (2016) describe traditional theories as "first wave" or foundational, explaining a burgeoning desire to bring the student to the centre gave rise to a "second wave" of theories more inclusive of diversity and students' lived experience, ultimately, morphing into a more critical view in the "third wave" (p. 18).

First Wave: Foundational Student Development Theory

First wave student development theory is used to explain the context, make sense of findings, or inform recommendations on post-secondary student success initiatives. These theories are commonly organized into four families of student development theory (See Figure 2.1). This literature review highlights the psychosocial, and briefly, the cognitive-structural, as they provide the most insight into the developmental aspect of the student experience, and therefore, may offer the greatest context and insight into the FYE course experience.

Figure 2.1

Four Families of Student Development Theory

Psychosocial	Focuses on personal and interpersonal variables	(Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1952; Perry, 1968, 1970)
Cognitive-Structural	Focuses on intellectual development and how students interpret and make meaning out of their learning experiences.	(Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Perry, 1968; Kohlberg, 1981)
Person-Environment	Focuses on relationships with others and society while emphasizing healthy growth and development.	(Holland, 1997; Strange & Banning, 2001)
Humanistic	Focuses on interactions of students in their learning environment.	(Maslow, 1934)

For post-secondary faculty and many student affairs professionals whose practices and work with students is rooted in constructivism or humanism (Dewey, 1916: 1938/1997; Piaget, 1952, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978), psychosocial student development theory is a comfortable and sensible explanation of the student life cycle and the learner's identity construction process. Educational psychologist, William Perry (1968) developed a theory of intellectual and ethical development providing insight into how students position themselves in relation to the knowledge construction process inherent in their post-secondary journey.

Perry's (1968) scheme of intellectual and ethical development outlines stages through which students move; interestingly, it appears Perry was most interested in the movement between stages, not the stages themselves. In relation to these transitions, Perry suggested cognitive development happens at different rates for different learners, and is dependent on the aspect of life in question; providing insight into the varied level of preparedness and ability of each student, as well as revealing the range of needs that exist, especially as learners become more diverse in age, stage and ability. This model helps conceptualize how learners arrive at knowing, offering an explanation of why learning and cognitive development can be difficult processes. Further, Perry (1988) suggests classroom faculty have opportunities to support students' whole growth as both learners and human beings in higher education, affecting their intellectual and ethical development in the process.

Piaget's (1952, 1970) theories related to assimilation and accommodation contribute to our understanding of how the post-secondary learner can be influenced by their environment, where the skills of learning how to learn and thrive in higher education are either modelled, scaffolded and supported, or they are not. As this review of the literature will reveal, FYE course goals are most often that of assimilation and accommodation, keeping the learner from remaining

in a state of disequilibrium inherent in the transition into post-secondary. Piaget (1952) explains the importance of environment on this process, affirming the value of providing opportunity and space for students to acquire the skills required to learn and thrive in a new learning environment. Institutions that provide students with timely and relevant supports to scaffold their development, offer rich opportunities for students to assimilate and accommodate new ways of knowing, doing, and being, building an ecosystem whereby students are more likely to succeed (Tinto, 2012).

Perry's (1968, 1970, 1988) and Piaget's (1952, 1970) psychosocial theories of student development draw our attention to the complexity of development, particularly identity development. Chickering's (1972) theory of cognitive structural student development is also useful in this discussion. Chickering outlines seven vectors or tasks that students move through or accomplish in their post-secondary education, including developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy toward interdependence; cultivating interpersonal relationships; and establishing identity, integrity, and purpose. Movement along these vectors may happen sequentially or simultaneously. Although dated and originally developed when entry into post-secondary was direct from high-school, when used critically, this theory supports student services professionals as they make meaning of the student experience and seek to understand the non-cognitive development of students of all ages and stages: in essence, Chickering's theory reaffirms the importance of making thoughtfully planned supports available as students navigate their way through postsecondary education (Rogers, 1974).

Second Wave: Toward a More Holistic View

Second wave student development theories lay a foundation for the many inclusive theories used today (Baxter-Magolda, 2009; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Cross, 1991; Helms,

1990). Perry (1970) emphasized a student's ability to acknowledge their role in the knowledge construction and decision making process was foundational to the development of more critical and complex ways of thinking. Most notable, and perhaps most relevant to this inquiry, is the holistic theory of self-authorship by Baxter-Magolda (2009), which integrates the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains of development to provide a more fulsome understanding of the intersectionality of identity and independence. This theory provides insight into how students holistically make meaning across these three domains, rather than viewing development in isolation, a view more characteristic of "first wave" theories. Baxter-Magolda, King, Taylor, and Wakefield (2012) followed students' developmental growth from authority dependence toward self-authorship, and from their transitions into post-secondary through to their second year (*N*= 2228). Annual interviews with students provided qualitative insight into the gradual occurring shift, revealing 86% of first year students relied solely on the influence and support of external authorities to define their beliefs, identity, and relationships; by second year, this number dropped to 57%, further, the majority of participants *(n* = 144, 63%) showed development. Students reported becoming aware of uncertainty, recognizing multiple perspectives, and the emergence of an internal voice as steps along their path toward self-authorship. As their internal voice strengthened, so too did their development of self-authorship.

This second wave knowledge reveals a deeper understanding of the developmental nature of the post-secondary learner, the importance of scaffolding not only their transition into a new environment and life stage (first wave), but the complexity inherent in constructing new ways of thinking, knowing, and doing (second wave). Baxter Magolda (2004) suggests first year experience programs, "Validate learners' capacity to know, situate learning in learners' experience, and define learning as mutually constructing meaning" (p. 41) are essential building

blocks for effective first year programs, specifically those seeking to scaffold a student's development of self-authorship along their journey into and through post-secondary. While second wave theories are generally more inclusive of the whole student, Jones and Stewart (2016) argue by excluding dominant ideologies, they are in fact reproducing and reinforcing their normalcy:

> Although a significant contribution of many of these theories is an increased focus on minoritized and marginalized social identities, left mostly unscrutinized were majoritized and dominant identities… because of this tension between attention to marginalized populations and silence on privileged groups, some of the scholarship of this second wave overemphasized "giving voice" to underrepresented groups (which is actually quite a disempowering phrase because it suggests that those with privilege give permission to marginalized populations to speak) and focusing on "the other" as individuals. (p. 21)

In response to these types of concerns, a third and more inclusive wave emerged as an attempt to bring student development theory into a more critical and inclusive space.

Third Wave: The Importance of Student Identity

Discussions of identity remain at the forefront in this contemporary "third wave," whereby identity is viewed as fluid, based on students' social and environmental settings (Butler, 2004; Hesse, 2007); such views provide insight into how the student experience is in constant flux and influenced by the post-secondary environment and its many social experiences. Theorists such as Hesse (2007) argue identity classifications such as race or gender work to normalize inequity and urge us to examine more critically the factors of oppression and equity. These theories encourage us to question the student success research that historically classified students based on how they identified, and instead encourages us to examine how all students are

subject to the nature of different systems of oppression based on their social location, and the modern contextual influences at play on their fluctuating identity.

Jones and Stewart's (2016) critical assessment of student development theory exposes how power laden assumptions about "who college is for" (p. 24) permeates earlier student development theories. In addition to acknowledging the fluidity of identity, they suggest our understanding of students (i.e., who can be a student) has shifted, urging the evolution and application of student development theory:

> On today's multigenerational campuses, there are no longer clear generational cohorts that describe and separate students from faculty and staff, but rather overlapping generational cohorts and roles. As a result, considerations of collegians over the age of 25, with disabilities, or from working class backgrounds as *students,* necessarily complicate the developmental models that are predominate in student affairs work. (Jones and Stewart, 2016, p. 24, emphasis in original)

Armed with a critical awareness about the fluctuating identity of the student, and an openness about "who college is for" (p. 24), this research seeks to bring to the forefront experiences and voices that may have been traditionally silenced from the student development literature.

In addition, Jones and Stewart (2016) suggest contemporary third wave student development theories are a patchwork of research and practice, and "revise[d] existing theory" and "generate[d] new theory" (p. 25), emphasizing the power inherent in this interdisciplinary approach, while reiterating the importance of working toward "liberatory and healing ends" (p. 25). Where the first wave emphasized post-secondary as a unique transition, worthy of its own theoretical framework to ground and contextualize the student experience, the second wave built on this understanding and revealed the complexity of identity formation, extending the

understanding into the realm of learning, whereby the students' ability to think and form ideas is viewed along a continuum of highly reliant on others, toward an independent thinker, referred to as self-authorship. The third wave questions the dominant ideology and power-laden assumptions inherent in the first and second wave, and suggests a theoretical eclecticism, whereby theory is patch worked together in a way questioning traditional ways of knowing, doing, and being, a stance aligning deeply with my conviction as a feminist.

Beyond the Third Wave: Mindset and Grit

As suggested in the first and second wave, students' transition into post-secondary requires they begin to shape and shift their identity into one of a learner, and to begin to see their potential as limitless and their skills as malleable. As these theories have suggested, this shift in thinking is the responsibility of the student and the institution. The theoretical eclecticism suggested of the third wave has paved the way for the student experience to be viewed through positive psychological theories of mindset and grit in order to understand and contextualize the fluctuating identity of the post-secondary student in the contemporary student experience. This extends the reach of student development theory beyond attrition into better understanding the first-year student and the factors that can influence their ability to reach their unlimited potential.

Mindset. The transition into higher education presents a challenge that few learners are academically prepared for (Grayson et al., 2019). Psychologist Dweck (2006) has conducted extensive research investigating the ability of mindset to influence academic outcomes; her original theory highlights the malleability of mindset, emphasizing growth mindsets can positively influence students' academic and social resilience (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). The theory argues academic and social skills necessary for success are only of importance if one believes they have the ability or potential to improve. Of significance to this inquiry is Dweck's

(2006) evidence that displays the shift from a fixed to growth mindset results in improved resiliency. Here, Dweck distinguishes between two different implicit theories of intelligence: entity and incremental. Entity describes more fixed or rigid orientations, where ability is measured. Yeager and Dweck (2012) describe this as "a world of threats and defenses" (p. 304). Contrarily, the incremental theory, or growth-orientated thinking is a world of possibility, where "everything (challenges, effort, setbacks) is seen as being helpful to learn and grow" (p. 304). To date, Dweck's work has largely focused on student success in elementary and secondary education, but it provides important insight on the potential of a learning environment and mindset coaching to influence student success in post-secondary. Although Dweck's work on mindset provides insight into how students can be inspired to adopt an approach to learning more likely to lead to success, the work on mindset should be considered with an important note of caution. The "challenges, effort, setbacks" (p. 304) described by Dweck should be viewed within the context of the very real "threats and defenses" that stand in the way of student success including, but not limited to, institutionalized racism, sexism, heterosexism, and dominant cis-gendered, able-bodied, neuro-normative ways of knowing. I feel it is important to note that the oppressive forces at play in our educational systems, although not the scope of this inquiry, require disrupting and dismantling. The conversation that follows about mindset is not to suggest that the burden is on students to adopt a mindset that dismisses, minimizes, or combats oppressive "threats and defenses", rather the ability of mindset to influence a student's thinking about their potential will be explored.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) lend insight into how an incremental stance could result in a learner who is more apt to respond resiliently to challenges. It is possible the interventions and supports described in this literature review may be accessed as determined by a learner's

mindset, such that a growth-oriented learner might be better positioned to circumvent disability, challenge, or lower intelligence. Yeager and Dweck suggest mindset,

> …shapes students' *goals* (whether they are eager to learn or instead care mostly about looking smart and, perhaps even more important, not looking dumb), their *beliefs about effort* (whether effort is a key to success and growth or whether it is a signal that they lack natural talent), their *attributions* for their setbacks (whether a setback means that they need to work harder and alter their strategies or whether it means they might be "dumb"), and their *learning strategies* in the face of setbacks (whether they work harder or whether they give up, consider cheating, and/or become defensive). (p. 304, emphasis in original)

Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck (2007) began to build a case for the value of mindset coaching in remedial educational programs. They designed two different study skill interventions to support youths' academic (math) transition: a control group (eight study skills sessions) and a treatment group (eight study skill sessions, embedded with incremental theory). The control group showed a steady decline in math grades over the transitional period, a common trend noted by the researchers. The treatment group not only eliminated, but also reversed this trend; this finding was attributed to the resilience built by developing an incremental theory (growth mindset) allowing students to apply their study skills to improve practice. Looking to test similar scalable interventions, Paunesku, Walton, Romero, Smith, Yeager, and Dweck (2015) delivered brief growth-mindset and sense-of-purpose interventions in the form of an online module to 1,594 students in 13 geographically diverse secondary schools. They found the mindset intervention interaction effect significant for at-risk students ($p = 0.022$), making them more likely to be academically successful in their core academic classes compared

with control-group students ($p = 0.007$) as shown by a significant increase in academic grades (+6.0%, $p < 0.001$). These findings (recently replicated in Yeager et al., 2019) build a case for the importance of teaching mindset within the context of academic remediation. Further, such findings suggest the potential of mindset coaching to influence student's identity as learners, and their ability to apply academic success strategies.

Grit. Grit theory merges well with mindset work; in my estimation, grit is a mindset necessary for post-secondary learning. Defining grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (p. 1087), Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) note that,

> Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course. (p. 1087-1088)

Duckworth et al. (2007) explain that "working harder" is more easily understood, and the concept of grit, "working longer," without switching objectives (p. 1098) may be more difficult to conceptualize. This conceptualization of grit provides insight on goal attainment and suggests academic performance as a common measure of student success might not be the best measure of a student's likeliness to persist, but rather factors associated with the grittier individual may correlate better to graduation rates (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Duckworth, Quinn, & Tsukayama, 2012). For example, Duckworth and Seligman (2005) conducted a longitudinal study of eighth graders, to discover self-discipline measured in the fall term accounted for twice as much variance in IQ on students' final grades, suggesting untapped intellectual potential may be the result of failure to exercise self-discipline, a factor they associated with the gritty student.

Hodge, Wright, and Bennett (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study ($N = 395$) to measure student grit, engagement, and academic productivity among Australian university students. Grit was measured using a validated eight-item grit scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009), providing evidence to support Duckworth's previous findings (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Duckworth et al., 2007) grit plays a role in academic achievement. Hodge et al. (2018) found significant grit-productivity and grit-engagement relationships. This theoretical model was supported by the empirical data ($p < 0.01$) "suggesting that grit has a direct effect on grades" (p. 455), while implying a potential indirect effect through engagement. Further, they found engagement mediated the relationship between grit and productivity and the "effect of *grit* on productivity is facilitated by a heightened level of *engagement*" (p. 456, emphasis in original). This lends to a more contemporary understanding of how student engagement initiatives can maximize students' potential, suggesting the ripple effect this work might have on a students' overall success.

First, second, and third wave student development theory, when combined with theories of mindset and grit and situated in the research on student development, provide insight into the student transition into higher education and suggest unique ways the non-cognitive domain may influence a student's ability to persist toward the attainment of long-term goals. Many institutions have taken up the challenge to support student success by implementing FYE courses, but the curricular goals and approaches are often as unique as the institutions.

Institutional Approaches to Supporting Student Success

There are many different philosophies and approaches enacted by student affairs staff to guide efforts to improve and support the student experience, often reflective of the historical waves of student development theory. Relevant to this research inquiry are both developmental

and intrusive approaches, as both support the curricular goals of FYE courses, thus scaffolding the academic and social development of students. The developmental approach, employed by academic advisors, learning skills specialists, and other student support services, is described by King (2005) as both a process and an orientation whose overall goal is to model and teach the skills necessary for success in post-secondary to those with an orientation and motivation toward success (Crookson, 1972; Creamer & Creamer, 1994). Developmental approaches are most often guided by the student, but rely on the knowledge of a supportive student affairs professional to model and teach the skills necessary for success. Developmental support scaffolds students' psychosocial and cognitive development, recognizing the learner needs the more valuable insight of a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). Institutional approaches to supporting student success, as well as FYE course curricular goals, commonly embed elements of developmental advising, and scaffolding the skills and abilities required for success in post-secondary education (Tinto, 1993).

Proactive approaches (formerly known as intrusive) anticipate student needs and do not rely on the student to initiate help; outreach is planned prior to student distress (Varney, n.d.). Unlike developmental advising, timely interventions are planned to support students, reaching out to those who might otherwise not seek support (Appleton, 1983; Glennen, 1975; Tinto, 1975). In a publication for The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA), Varney (n.d.) writes proactive advising also involves showing care and concern for students and becoming involved, offering "deliberate intervention," working to educate students on all options, offering intensive advising, all in the name of the promoting and supporting the student's likelihood of success (p. 1). Traditionally, these developmental and proactive initiatives take place within student services, outside the classroom context, on what Tinto (2012) terms the

"margins of a student's educational life" (p. 5). Tinto suggests institutions, when planning for effective action, have historically "neglected the classroom" (p. 5), the one common place where students and faculty gather to learn; Tinto argues institutions of higher learning must "focus on improving success in the classroom, particularly during the first year and lead to changes in the way classes are structured and taught and, in turn, experienced by students especially those who have not fared well in the past" (p. 6). It is increasingly necessary to extend the conversation beyond why students leave, towards why they stay. It is for this reason this inquiry shifts its gaze toward students and faculty, within the context of the classroom, and in particular FYE courses.

First Year Experience (FYE) Courses

> First, seminars [FYE courses] often seek to prepare students for future collegiate decisions by "planting seeds" that are not expected to immediately produce fruit. Second, seminars are often a kind of "insurance" that all students receive key information even though it is provided in a number of other venues. (Porter & Swing, 2006, p. 106)

According to Fidler and Fidler (1991), the first non-credit FYE course was offered in 1888 and the first for credit course in 1911, with its popularity increasing since inception. Although interest has fluctuated over the years, popularity began to rise again in the 1960s and 1970s, with heightened institutional awareness about issues of student attrition, particularly students' transition and adjustment within their first year of study, and the resulting financial cost to higher education. Barefoot (2000) states that when asked what first year students struggle with, faculty assert learners are "disengaged academically, unmotivated, can't write, can't spell, have a ten-minute attention span, expect instant gratification" (p. 13). Barefoot offers this as rationale for renewed faculty interest in FYE courses as a means to equip students with the motivation and tools they need to be successful.

Barefoot (2000) states that FYE courses have been adopted by nearly 70% of America's four-year colleges and universities. A preliminary review of course offerings in Canada suggests there is variety in how the courses are offered and whether they are mandatory or optional. For example, in Ontario colleges, FYE courses are often connected to a program of study, and in many cases, they are compulsory, such as Humber College's non-credit compulsory *i-Succeed in Fitness* and *i-Succeed in Hospitality and Tourism*. Other institutions appear to have made mandatory a full-credit course such as *Skills for Success* (Algonquin College, Marketing and Management), *Foundations for Success in Health Care* (Georgian College, Pre-Health Science), *and Success in Human Services and Beyond* (Georgian College, Child and Youth Care). In the university system, these courses appear more often as optional for students who seek learning support such as Nipissing University's *UNIV 1011: Success: Theory and Practice* and/or for students perceived to be at risk (i.e., those placed on academic probation), such as at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia's *UNIV 0001*.

Curricular Goals of FYE Courses

Although the core content or curriculum of FYE courses is not universally defined, the two most common goals include enhancing students' academic success through study skill development and supporting students' non-academic or affective development. Hattie et al. (1996) classify learning interventions dependent on their overall purpose: cognitive interventions are referred to as task-related skills (p. 100) such as note-taking, summarizing, and underlining; metacognitive interventions focus on self-regulation and self-management; and affective interventions target the non-cognitive relating to self-concept, motivation, and the learner's attributions for success and/or failure (p. 100). Similarly, Upcraft et al., (2005) assert the most

effective FYE courses are those that facilitate students' academic and non-academic success in tandem.

Supporting academic success. The research on attrition and persistence reveals a strong link between academic preparedness and student withdrawal. According to Hickinbottom-Brawn and Burns (2015), many FYE courses stem from the belief that students are underprepared, and that many academically struggling post-secondary learners have weak or underdeveloped study skills (Grayson et al., 2019; Procter, Prevatt, Adams, Reaser, & Petscher, 2006; Rachal, Daigle, & Rachal, 2007; Wernersbach, Crowley, Bates, & Rosenthal, 2014). Tulbure (2015) revealed students employ a limited number of learning techniques, and are interested in receiving more instruction or information on more efficient strategies. The research (Duckworth et al., 2007; Tulbure, 2015, Wernersbach, et al., 2014; Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Yeager, et al, 2019), and my experience as a student affairs professional, affirm study skills are malleable, and can be taught and developed in learners, most notably through well designed learning interventions.

The explicit instruction of learning strategies, most often referred to as "learning to learn," or in this case, teaching students how to learn, holds great promise in supporting and improving student success (Tuckman & Kennedy, 2011, p. 479). Learning skill interventions, as described by Hattie et al. (1996) are, "aimed at enhancing motivation, mnemonic skills, self-regulation, study-related skills such as time management, and even general ability itself: creating positive attitudes toward both content and context: and minimizing learning pathologies" (p. 99-100). Litteral and Taylor (2015) critically reflected on their experience teaching an FYE course, making a wealth of recommendations, suggesting that although some FYE courses are subject based, the focus should remain on the development of skills, including the skills required to be a successful student.

In a study by Yorke (2000), six elements were found to significantly interrupt a student's ability to thrive in higher education; of particular relevance to this inquiry are time management of heavy workloads and limited study skills. Interventions, such as FYE courses, commonly scaffold time management skills and provide explicit instruction in learning skills or strategies, such as, reading comprehension, note-taking, test preparation techniques, and test-taking strategies (Wernersbach, et al., 2014). Research (Cone & Owens, 1991; Hattie et al., 1996; O'Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009; Wernersbach et al., 2014) demonstrates post-secondary courses that include study skills instruction result in improved academic success, retention, and self-efficacy.

Supporting non-academic growth. The second most common curricular goal of FYE courses is to support the development of the whole student. A number of strategies have emerged from the research literature, most of which are intended to support students in becoming socially connected with their peers, cultivate relationships between the learner and student supports on campus, promote student wellness, and encourage students' co-curricular involvement on campus (Choate & Smith, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Rooted in student development theories, students who cultivate a sense of belonging by engaging with the co-curriculum (campus life and activities resting outside of the academic curriculum) are more likely to be retained, most notably because of the positive effect on their affective growth and development (O'Keeffe, 2013; Tinto, 1993, 2012).

Institutional awareness of the role and power of the affective domain contributes to the development of many first-year student success initiatives, such as summer-bridge programs, new student orientation, peer mentoring, tutoring, supplemental instruction, and FYE courses. As such, many FYE courses aim to fulfill this function. Elements of FYE course phenomena,

influential on affective development and thus student success, include peer interaction (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Barefoot, Griffen & Koch, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), engaging students with campus life (Starke, Harth, & Sirianni, 2001), and fostering a sense of belonging (O'Keefe, 2013). It is commonly argued that a true learner-centred approach reflects the identity and needs of the student in addition to implementing these high impact practices alone (Pascarella, 2006).

Global Benefits and Efficacy of FYE Courses

Most of the research on FYE courses has examined efficacy without differentiating between type and style of course (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2004; Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Smith & Zhang, 2008). Prior studies offer consistent evidence that FYE courses have positive effects, as related to student persistence, on retention or graduation rates, academic success or grade-point average (GPA), and student satisfaction (Andreatta, 1998; Barton & Donahue, 2009; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Cuseo, 1991; Jamelske, 2009; Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Porter & Swing, 2006; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Vander Schee, 2011; Weisgerber, 2005; Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989; Yale, 1999).

Retention or graduation rates. Institutional support of student persistence initiatives emerged largely as a result of attrition; despite the financial burden, few institutions track individual student progress, and fewer still have invested in longitudinal studies to capture retention graduation rates. There are also definitional and measurement issues with student persistence; for example, persistence may not necessarily mean a student completed their program of study, but instead may be a measure of their intent to persist or continue their post-secondary journey. Student self-reports of intent to persist and re-enrollment (i.e., retention) rates may provide a different measure of persistence than graduation rates. Even graduation rates,

however, may pose challenging, as few measures exist to capture students who have transferred programs or institutions, or who have fallen out of sequence in their program of study (Habley et al., 2012).

Barton and Donahue (2009) suggest retention is difficult to measure, particularly in relation to a FYE course experience; they suggest future research examine the individual factors that prepare students for academic success, noting "a byproduct of academic success is increased retention, but retention itself is not an accurate measure for judging the effectiveness of first-year seminars" (p. 276). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state most studies exploring the efficacy of FYE courses, "provide few controls for such potentially confounding factors as gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or academic ability and achievement" (p. 402). Even if confounding factors were controlled for, the challenge of measuring success would always remain based on the fact college completion, academic performance, and persistence are not synonymous with success. While success is defined differently by various stakeholders, the research literature typically uses an institutional definition. Success, in relation to FYE courses, as defined and explained by stakeholders, is limited in the research literature. Documenting the student voice is a goal of this inquiry, particularly as FYE faculty endeavour to create meaningful and student-centred learning opportunities.

Wilkie and Kuckuck (1989) controlled for the likeliness that students who voluntarily enroll in an FYE course may have better developed study skills or self-awareness in the first place, known as the volunteer effect. The research participants (n=183) were identified at risk and were then assigned whether or not to enroll in an FYE course. The yearly retention rates of the control and experimental group were compared over a three-year period. Although not considered statistically significant, retention increased slightly each year. Similarly, Strumpf and

Hunt (1993) found positive results while controlling for volunteer effect, tracking participants for two years revealing course participants in their experimental group had statistically higher retention rates than the control group, suggesting all students have the potential to benefit from the learning opportunities inherent in a FYE course.

Weisgerber (2005) found 62% of students enrolled in an FYE course persisted into their following year, while only 20% of students who did not take the course returned for their following year (p. 98). Clark and Cundiff (2011) found students who choose to take an FYE course are different from those who do not ($p < 0.00$); seven statistically significant covariates existed between the two groups; students who enrolled in the FYE course, "tended to have lower high school GPAs [grade-point average] and ACT [American College testing] scores; were more extraverted, agreeable, obliged to attend college (introjected regulation); and were less lonely than those in the comparison group" (p. 628). These covariates provide insight into the complexity of the persistence puzzle, suggesting non-cognitive factors, such as attitude, mindset, and belonging have an effect on students' ability to persist (Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Duckworth et al., 2007; Dweck, 2006; O'Keeffe, 2013).

Porter and Swing (2006) studied over 20,031 students who participated in FYE courses at 45 four-year institutions, examining the effect of an FYE transition-style course on their intent to persist. This cross-institutional study used the First-Year Initiative (FYI) survey to gather data at each institution, and a multilevel modeling approach to estimate the impact of the FYE course on students' intent to persist, something they argue and cite as a proven indicator of actual persistence. Their study found for every standard deviation change in the average rating of effectiveness in general study skills and/or health education, students' intent to persist through their program of study and beyond increased 16 (study skills) and 14 (health education)

percentage points. They argue, “it makes intuitive sense that students who quickly gain confidence in their study skills would believe that they are likely to be successful in college and so plan to continue their enrollment” (p. 106). They suggest an emphasis on health is “acknowledgement that students are more than “cognitive beings” (p. 106). Their findings provide evidence certain elements of FYE courses, notably study skills and health education, can influence the student experience.

Academic success or grade-point average (GPA). GPA is not necessarily a predictor of persistence, but is a commonly-used measure of student success. A study by Barton and Donahue (2009) found, while retention was not higher for first-year seminar students ($p > 0.05$), participants did earn a higher GPA by the end of the first year compared to the control group. Their findings also revealed students reported working harder, were more engaged with campus activities, and discussed their grades more often with faculty, variables that could very well contribute to student satisfaction. Other studies have found a positive correlation between FYE courses and students’ grade-point-average (Jamelske, 2009; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989).

Tuckman and Kennedy (2011) explored the effects of a learning strategy course on GPA, retention, and graduation rates. While learning strategies courses are not always classified as FYE courses, their curricular goals often overlap, especially in FYE courses that are deemed transitional or remedial in nature. The core curriculum of this particular course included learning strategies, such as taking reasonable risk, accepting responsibility for outcomes, searching the environment for information, and using feedback. Sub-strategies included goal setting, breaking-down tasks, planning, asking questions, and the ability to self-monitor or self-instruct. The curriculum was, “aimed at teaching students to meet the goals of overcoming procrastination,

building self-confidence, becoming more responsible, managing their lives, learning from lecture, learning from text, preparing for tests, writing papers and managing their lives" (p. 483), addressing both the students' cognitive and metacognitive development.

Tuckman and Kennedy compared 351 first-year students enrolled in a learning strategy course with 351 matched non-course takers; students who took the course earned statistically significant higher GPAs ($p = 0.026$), were six times more likely to be retained ($p = 0.003$), and had higher graduation rates than the control group (over 50% higher) for students who were initially categorized as in academic difficulty ($p = 0.002$).

Aside from Tuckman and Kennedy's (2011) study, other studies (Cone & Owens, 1991; Forster, Swallow, Fodor, & Foulser, 1999; Gunn, Hearne, & Sibthorpe, 2011; Wibrowski, Matthews, & Kitsantas, 2016; Wernersbach et al., 2014) have demonstrated the efficacy of learning strategy courses on student success. The research is, however, ambiguous about the efficacy of embedding learning skills instruction in academic content courses. Yang's (2006) study of embedded learning skills instruction in an online course, demonstrated students' use of cognitive strategies ($p < 0.007$) and performance control ($p < 0.025$) improved, but self-efficacy ($p < 0.143$) did not. A later study conducted by Gunn et al. (2011) highlighted the efficacy of embedding learning skills instruction within the core curriculum of a course. Qualitative research about the phenomena of learning how to learn in the classroom, as a post-secondary success intervention, is limited to date.

Padgett et al. (2013) explored the influence of FYE courses on the less commonly studied outcomes of critical thinking and cognition. Using the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (a national longitudinal student dataset from 48 colleges and universities), their analysis targeted five factors including frequency of interactions with faculty, degree of positive

peer interactions, extent to which students' first college year featured integrated ideas or information, overall academic challenge and effort, and diversity experiences. Their findings suggest that,

> participation in first-year seminars significantly increases the likelihood of a first year characterized by the integration of ideas, information, and experiences as well as academic challenge and effort, and that these two good practices, in turn enhance first-year growth in need for cognition. (p. 142-144)

Padgett et al.'s (2013) examination of first-year seminars on cognitive measures suggests FYE courses enhance students' lifelong learning orientations and can positively impact more complex learning in ways that have been previously proven in the research or literature, enhancing students' motivation to inquire. They suggest when intentionally designed, with a purposeful curriculum, and a pedagogical approach supporting student inquiry, FYE courses have the potential to challenge students' cognitive development.

Pittendrigh, Borkowski, Swinford, and Plumb (2016) further explored student undergraduate persistence, observing students' intellectual skills throughout a semester. The College Student Inventory (CSI), used by many American colleges and universities to identify potential early leavers, was administered to 1,964 students, 20 percent of whom were enrolled in the Knowledge and Community FYE course. A secondary measurement was administered for FYE course participants on the first day of the course, and again during the last week, to assess students' self-perceptions of academic attitudes and skills. The results showed persistence rates improved for FYE course participants; most notably, the persistence rate for higher-risk students improved at double the rate of the improvements for lower-risk students. Their analysis revealed higher persistence rates correlate with perceived value of college to reach employment goals,

which has the potential to counteract some of the effects associated with lower motivation. Persistence rates were also positively associated with the preference for discussion-based classes or increased likelihood to participate voluntarily in classroom discussions; it may be that "participating in classroom discussions may allow the less confident students to see that they are members of the classroom community and, by extension, the university community" (p. 63).

Student satisfaction. The research in student satisfaction, although much less abundant, begins to draw a picture of students' lived experiences in relation to the FYE course experience. Using mixed methods, Andreatta (1998) explored student perception of social and academic integration and retention, concluding that the "freshman experience course," a credit-bearing academic seminar, contributed positively to student integration experiences and students' sense of belonging, both of which were used as indicators of retention and satisfaction; there was no exploration of the actual student experiences in their first-year experience course. Previous research has linked social and academic integration to increased satisfaction and retention (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), but it would be beneficial to explore the holistic FYE experience with students in order to understand how integration is best facilitated in the FYE course, and how/why social and academic skills support student grit and persistence.

Yale's (1999) doctoral research examined the impact of a one-credit FYE course on student retention, academic progress, and academic and social integration, while controlling for the above-mentioned volunteer effect. Yale found that participation in an FYE course positively impacted variables, such as peer group interactions ($p < 0.007$), academic and intellectual development ($p < 0.000$), institutional and goal commitment, ($p < 0.000$) faculty concern for student development ($p < 0.000$), use of student services ($p < 0.019$) and participation in clubs and organizations ($p < 0.047$). Although the mean scores were generally higher, results from

Yale's study did not produce statistically significant results to link the effect of the FYE course on first-to-second year retention ($p < 0.548$) or GPA ($p < 0.051$).

Smith and Zhang (2008) examined students' perceptions of the helpfulness of different people and programs on college transition, which begins to paint a picture of the lived experiences of students in relation to an FYE course. They found 34% of students did not think the FYE course was helpful, while 34% found it somewhat helpful. Students who perceived the course as not at all helpful had higher GPAs than students who said it was very helpful. Supporting Keup and Barefoot (2005), they suggest given this, "intriguing finding" (p. 38), resources allocated to FYE courses might be more effective if directed to initiatives more positively received.

Barton and Donahue's (2009) examination of the effects of the FYE course experience revealed a statistically significant association between the FYE course experience, and student expectations and engagement. Although, not direct measures of satisfaction, these findings do provide important insight into the student experience. First-year seminar students entered with higher expectations for obtaining academic help ($p < 0.003$), higher initial expectations ($p = 0.03$), and higher participation in campus events and activities ($p = 0.03$), factors associated with increased student satisfaction (Tinto, 2012). This inquiry accepts Smith and Zhang's (2008) recommendation further research to examine what first-year seminars do that is, or is not helpful for students in their transition experience.

Benefits of Specific Types of FYE Courses

The research concerning the efficacy of FYE courses does not typically differentiate by course type, however, there is a great deal of research documenting the various styles and learning experiences of FYE courses, often dependent on institutional purpose. Porter and Swing

(2006) suggest the diversity and purpose of FYE courses can be categorized into transition, remedial, special academic, discipline, and mixed format. The FYE course, that is the subject of this inquiry, began as a transition course, but has recently shifted into a special academic and discipline themed FYE course over the course of this inquiry by embedding core health-care content alongside FYE curriculum. Porter and Swing suggest the difference between special academic and discipline course is nominal and difficult to isolate; for the purposes of this inquiry, they will be considered as one and the same.

Transition courses. Aligned with the student development approach, transition courses are intended to support students as they journey from secondary school into post-secondary education; the focus is on building academic skills and encouraging students' academic and co-curricular engagement. Friedman and Marsh (2009) compared the efficacy of a college transition to an elective academic FYE course and found no significant difference in retention levels or GPAs. Students in the college transition theme did however, perceive a greater improvement in their out-of-class engagement and knowledge of campus policies. Students in the transition seminars also gave higher ratings on several perceived course outcomes, such as academic services, belonging/ acceptance, and satisfaction with the institution.

Using a multiple-measure approach, Barton and Donahue (2009) examined the effects of the FYE course experience by looking at students who had either taken a four-credit FYE course; a one week, one-credit summer orientation FYS called Summer Experience course; or a one-credit fall course named Explorations in Learning. In reviewing the goals and shared expectations of the three courses, all three appear to be of the transition style. Their findings revealed no differences in retention ($p > 0.05$) between these groups, although retention was highest after the first semester for students taking the summer experience and first-year seminar.

Interestingly, when examining academic performance before entering college and during the first year, they found first-year seminar students earned significantly higher GPAs at the end of the first year ($p = 0.05$). Although Barton and Donahue suggest their findings might be skewed by a biased population of better students taking the course (volunteer effect), their findings do suggest the importance of time in the FYE course experience, both the timing in the student lifecycle, and frequency of contact hours.

Jessup-Anger (2011) explored how students in a one-credit, pass or fail seminar made meaning of their motivation to learn throughout the duration of their transitional FYE course experience. This single-case-study design provides qualitative insight, revealing significant motivational barriers were present from the very beginning of students' FYE experience. Based on the fact the course was pass or fail, and only worth one-credit, the instructor felt they could not expect as much from the students, and felt students did not prioritize their FYE course, often producing subpar work, mainly based on their understanding of what would constitute a pass. In the same study, Jessup-Anger found connecting the subject matter of the FYE course to students' personal lives made the class more interesting, as it provided insight into the lives of their peers and increased their self-awareness. Students viewed their instructor as a coach, a strategy Jessup-Anger describes as effective in engaging students' motivational zones of proximal development and increasing their motivation to learn by helping them appreciate the value of the task or skill. Further, the perceived ease of the course appealed to students, suggesting institutions weigh the benefits of "providing a more demanding seminar that may lead to greater motivational gains for students in the long run, with, the drawbacks of depleted resources and potentially fewer students enrolled" (p. 113). Jessup-Anger calls for additional research to understand how students make meaning of their FYE course experience and their motivation to learn in varying types of

seminars (e.g., those building study skills or those that are mandatory). In addition, Jessup-Anger suggests the rigour and demand of FYE courses should be explored.

Transition-themed courses often target specific at-risk populations. Yan and Sendall (2016) used a mixed method and cross-sectional design (survey and interviews) to evaluate a FYE course customized for international students in an American college setting. This mandatory one credit course was originally designed to cover such topics as academic resources, self-exploration, and career advising. Their study examined the helpfulness of the different class formats and learning outcomes of the course, revealing the FYE course was successful in helping international students familiarize themselves with the wealth and variety of academic resources, academic expectations, understanding American culture, social connections, and improving English language skills. Participants identified the most helpful elements of the class as being community service-learning activities, group activities in class, oral presentation skills, community building activities, in-class discussions, and weekly journal entries. Students noted lecture, videos, and required readings were the, "not-so-helpful" aspects of their FYE course experience. In addition, noteworthy to this inquiry, participants (students) "mentioned that college provided a lot of information regarding academic resources during the orientation, but failed to educate students about how to use them" (p. 40). Extending the campus orientation experience is often a goal of transition themed FYE courses (Tinto, 2012).

Special academic and discipline courses. Special academic courses focus on a selected topic, including or embedding various transitional supports and study skills in an ad hoc manner; they are difficult to isolate because the embedded learning skills might not be explicitly outlined in the course content or learning outcomes, but rather intentionally integrated into the course design by faculty aware of the complexities of student development, learning, and

metacognition. Discipline courses are hosted by individual academic areas and often serve as an introduction to a major or area of study, scaffolding alongside the content, strategies for learning and post-secondary success; this type of course may be difficult to isolate and may not have FYE course objectives or outcomes. Discipline courses tend to be taught by program content experts, while student affairs professionals or faculty with more generalist qualifications, tend to teach the transition or remedial courses.

An examination of special academic and discipline-themed courses revealed each was unique with differences related to academic and campus engagement, as well as, career clarity. Zerr and Bjerke (2016) found no significant difference between academic and transition theme FYE courses when they examined direct measures such as retention into Year 2, GPA, and number of credits earned. When exploring indirect measures such as academic engagement, they found the academic seminar rated significantly better: students reported feeling more engaged academically. Researchers stated this was of particular focus in the academic course; as well, they noted,

> …qualitative information triangulates with this by painting a picture in which students could see ways in which the academic-themed seminar was forcing them to engage academically in ways that they did not always like but were able to acknowledge would be helpful for success in college. (p. 80)

This finding was corroborated by Pittendrigh et al. (2016) who found increased engagement for academic seminar participants.

Mennenga and Tschetter (2013) examined the implementation of a mandatory FYE course enacted in response to the financial concerns faced by students, the rise of undiagnosed disabilities/ emotional health issues coupled with the increase in academic expectations and the

reported decrease in good study habits. Individual colleges within the university were given the option to either use the general FYE course (transition theme) or to tailor the FYE course to their area of study (academic theme). Mennenga and Tschetter explored a mandatory Nursing FYE course, revealing an unintended outcome, career clarity, with one participant stating "…it just helped me realize that it's not what I'm meant to be doing," a common theme echoed by other respondents. Faculty were quick to identify this as a benefit. Unique to the academic theme FYE course, they state:

> Without this early exposure to nursing, students often are several semesters or years into their academic career and frequently are already in the nursing major when they realize nursing is not for them. This delay in changing their career paths not only puts the student behind academically, but also leaves a vacancy when the student changes majors. Our hope is that by assisting students in this decision early, students who end up in the nursing major will be less likely to drop or change their plan of study, therefore aiding retention of students in the program. Having the course taught by nursing faculty also offered students and nursing faculty early exposure to each other that may also assist in retention of students. (p. 221)

Interestingly, Mennenga and Tschetter (2013) found student participants expressed frustration with having to spend both time and money on an FYE course, many not seeing the value of such a course, even amidst their new-found career clarity.

The Canadian Context

Canadian studies on the FYE course phenomenon are less abundant, but the few exist provide meaningful insight into how the FYE course is enacted in the university system, and bring us closer to understanding the student experience. The Higher Education Quality Council

of Ontario (HEQCO) evaluated the effectiveness of the FYE course titled *UNIV 1011: Student Success: Theory and Practice* at Nipissing University. In this report, Dunn and Carfagnini (2010) found the following:

1. Students who take UNIV 1011 enjoy the course and feel it is valuable.
2. Students who take UNIV1011 believe it enhances their skills and allows them to be successful at university.
3. There is a correlation between successfully completing UNIV1011 and Year 1 to Year 2 retention at the university.
4. There appears to be little correlation between UNIV1011 and overall university marks.
5. Very few students at the university even know about UNIV1011 and its objectives, and the primary medium of information about the course continues to be the course calendar.

These findings are limited by the size and scope of the study and by the fact that during the time of the study, only 6% of the student population had participated in the course. In this study, UNIV 1011 was optional, and I would argue, was therefore, indicative of the volunteer effect, where it was more likely to be chosen by students who had the basic metacognition to know what they did not know, or to foresee the value of developing their academic skills at the start of their higher education journey, as evidenced by the 79% of students surveyed reporting they took the course "to help with transition to university study" (Dunn & Carfagnini, 2010, p. 25).

The volunteer effect earlier by Cavote and Kopera-Frye (2004), offers empirical evidence providing insight into these findings, corroborating the notion a student who self-identifies as

needing transitional support is likely to be self-aware enough to connect with supports and resources to support their own retention, persistence, and grit, beginning to build the case for the transitional supports such as FYE courses to be made mandatory. While not peer-reviewed, Dunn and Carfagnini's (2010) findings confirm what is known in the literature: students report the course enhanced their skills and allowed them to be successful (Finding 2) and yet there is little correlation between the course and university marks (Finding 4). This reaffirms the importance of understanding how the institution and students define, measure, and understand success. In this instance, students report the course assisted them in achieving success; by the institution's measures of success, grades did not improve, but retention between Years 1 and 2 did improve.

Birol, Han, Welsh, and Fox (2013) found an academic course has the potential to build the academic skills required for success in a particular area of study. They investigated the University of British Columbia's First-Year Seminar in Science, SCIE 113, a course intended to teach students how to think like a scientist and to equip them with the writing skills required for success in their program. After surveying students at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, as well as through a rigorous analysis of writing samples, Birol et al. found strong evidence of improved writing, with students generally improving their grade point average from a C+ in their first essay to a B in their last essay. Writing structure and argumentation were weighted evenly, and in addition to achieving its intended outcomes of supporting writing skill acquisition and the development of argumentation skills, researchers noted the seminar was also helpful in supporting students as they transitioned into university learning. Although not classified as a retention initiative, Birol, et al. state the most profound movement along the writing continuum was for lower level writers, whose average marks moved from an F to a C+

(p. 88). It is possible this marked skill improvement could very well support the persistence of these students into Year 2 and beyond.

A study conducted by Maher and Bertin (2013) investigated an Ontario college transitional program, Helping Youth Pursue Education (HYPE). Different from an FYE course the intervention supports youth from underserviced communities to gain the confidence to return to school. The program has a myriad of benefits, many of which align with the goals of an FYE course including to familiarize students with academic programs and services, reduce as many identified barriers to post-secondary as possible, engage students with campus culture, and establish and maintain relationships with staff, faculty and mentors. It is important to note this program also has unique features: it is provided at no cost, and it provided participants with meals and transportation subsidy, factors that might independently affect participation, buy-in and the overall effects of the program. This study offers qualitative insight into transitional supports and FYE initiatives in Ontario colleges, bringing voice to the student experience. Students shared the effect of the HYPE program on their academic abilities, stating once in post-secondary, “I wasn’t struggling; I was helping other students” (p. 109). Many comments echoed the importance of learning how to manage their time, while some suggested the rigor of the program did not replicate that of the post-secondary environment, “It doesn’t honestly prepare you for what college life is about, that you have to navigate on your own” (p. 110). Other comments alluded to the intrinsic motivation required to be successful, suggesting no quantity of money or subway tokens can help you succeed if you do not want to be there. This study is helpful in beginning to paint a picture of the student experience, however, to date, no such evaluation or critical assessment has been found on mandatory FYE courses in the Canadian context.

A more recent study by Ahadi et al. (2019) examined the design, delivery, and evaluation of a FYE course in the media and communications studies program at Simon Fraser University. With the goal of overcoming the sense of disconnectedness among first year students, elements of the first-year experience course were embedded alongside the content of an introductory course (Introduction to Communications Studies). Ahadi et al. acknowledge an administrative push within the institution drove this initiative, among other factors focusing on the student experience, most specifically that of the first year. This study relied on the previously cited best practices and work of Upcraft et al. (2005), employing a collaborative approach with partners such as the Library, Student Services, Advisors, Cooperative Education, Learning Commons and Healthy Campus. Academic skills, such as drafting paper proposals and exam preparation, were targeted. Using survey and focus groups, the researchers found "it takes a village to design an FYE course; partnering with units across all campus is key to success" (p. 78). They note the tendency of course development, especially of foundational courses, to become "instructor-centred project[s]" (p. 78), which resulted in isolated courses; as a result, they recommend FYE course design be viewed as a campus-wide project with multiple stakeholders.

Ahadi et al. (2019) also measured students' self-reported sense of improvement, revealing students directly admitted from high school experienced higher levels of growth than college transfer students. Student pre- and post-intervention self-indicators revealed improvement on academic tasks such as outlining a paper, thesis writing, and critical thinking increased in both groups (1-point increase in direct entry versus, 0.5 point increase in college transfer students). Students also reported they preferred activities directly related to their course requirements such as alumni panels, and a series of three workshops tailored to their term paper: library, essay writing, and formatting workshops (p. 80); they recommended these activities be

included in future offerings. Workshops on overall well-being, such as enrollment planning, healthy campus and success at university, were deemed less important by students, with only one third of students recommending them for future offerings. Ahadi, et al. conclude students tend to pay more attention to content they feel contributes to their performance in the course, it is possible students felt co-curricular activities interfered with time that could have been devoted to lecture. This supports the conundrum faced by faculty who are pressured to meet the multiple demands and expectations of an FYE course related to both academic and social goals (Jamelske, 2009).

Ahadi et al.'s (2019) study revealed a unique finding: students' transition out of the course plays an important role in shaping the FYE experience, particularly as they look ahead to future learning experiences:

> In a way this course is great because it's helpful for first year students. Like, I imagine if you were coming right from high school that something like this is really helpful to have, you know, where your teacher gives you a study sheet and takes the time to have a study session or a review session where he answers questions before exams. But in a way it's also like, maybe misleading because as first-years you get this impression that that's what's normal. (Ahadi et al., 2019, p. 81)

Other participants in this study felt as though they were "spoiled" with the class, a finding which the researchers use to springboard readers into thinking about how momentum from a FYE course could be carried forward into other courses to support students' academic development, suggesting this is part of a bigger and ongoing curricular conversation.

Most recently, an Ontario study (Grayson et al., 2019) revealed bolstering students' learning skills is a critical component to the student success puzzle. This study, born out of

"mounting frustration resulting from having to teach a growing number of students unprepared for their university studies" (p. 5) sought to assess arts and social science students' skills and knowledge, data "could eventually be used to make curricular changes, if a significant proportion of students reported serious academic skill deficiencies" (p. 5). This study began at York University, where academic learning skills such as writing, test taking, and time management were assessed using an advanced statistical classification algorithm, classifying students as "functional", "at risk", or "dysfunctional" (p. 5). Western University, the University of Waterloo, the University of Toronto Mississauga, and the University of Toronto Scarborough corroborated the initial findings at York, revealing that only 44% of students were prepared to do well in university. Based on their algorithm, 41% of participants were considered at-risk and 16% dysfunctional. It is important to note, family background, first-generation, and international status were not correlated to being classified at-risk or dysfunctional (p. 17). One finding of significance to the critical perspective employed in this study is the "accumulation of disadvantage or advantage" (p. 18), whereby student challenges were not randomly distributed but rather students who struggled in one area were likely to struggle in other areas suggesting the potential compounding effect of academic skill deficiency.

Although this study is focused on the overall first-year experience, Grayson et al. (2019) found students' preparedness did not vary by year of study, suggesting the need for academic skill development support throughout the student lifecycle. Further, the researchers suggest this might have an effect on students' future occupational success and democratic citizenship, suggesting academic skill development can impact student success well beyond the first year. These researchers build the case for academic skill development as an antidote for attrition stating that at-risk and dysfunctional learners were less likely than their functional peers to

achieve high grades, be dissatisfied with their university experience, and "considerably" more likely to consider leaving their campus prior to degree completion (p. 6).

Interestingly, Grayson et al. (2019) found 69% of students felt the need for a "compulsory first-year credit course that would cover subjects such as university standards, criteria, and procedures; critical thinking; effective studying; time management; improving writing; and jobs in the field in which you are majoring" (p. 6). Grayson et al. suggest many "hypothetical" (p. 29) remedies one of which proposes universities themselves deal with the deficiency through a compulsory first-year credit course, however they caution "the skills learned would need reinforcing through assignments and grading schemes in other courses during first year and beyond" (p. 29), or else, they caution they would simply "atrophy" (p. 29). This inquiry provides insight into how students might transfer newly acquired learning and academic skills, while pointing out the gap exists: How do students apply what they have learned in their FYE course to other more challenging courses? And, further, how do these skills become part of their identity as a learner, staying with them as they move on to future studies?

Pedagogical and Instructional Approaches to FYE Courses

My experience as both a teacher and student affairs professional at the post-secondary level has taught me that beyond the conditions and supports discussed thus far, classroom faculty can have a significant influence on students' ability to engage with learning, acquire understanding, and succeed in higher education. This inquiry seeks to uncover how one FYE course is experienced and understood by faculty as well as students; it is, therefore important to explore the challenges and recommendations that have emerged in relation to pedagogical and instructional approaches to FYE course delivery, inclusive of instructors' skills and mindset, as well solutions and best practices of FYE course instruction as presented in the research literature.

The Best Facilitators for FYE Courses

Levitz and Noel (1989) suggest FYE courses should be taught by the best professors. Cuseo (1991) suggests faculty should teach FYE courses in order to foster connections with students, as well as to unearth the professional learning inherent in supporting students' adjustment into and through their first year of college. Tinto (2006-2007) underscores the importance of faculty selection in all first-year classes, explaining first year is a

> critical year in which decisions to stay or leave are often made, where the foundations for effective learning are or are not established and where, by extension, the potential returns to institutional investment in student retention and learning are likely the greatest. (p. 8)

In addition, Tinto supports Pascarella and Terenzini's (1979) assertion that student-faculty interaction can improve social and intellectual growth, both in and out of the classroom.

Gore (2012) utilized a non-experimental causal-comparative research design to explore whether faculty or student affairs staff are best positioned to teach FYE courses. Although the findings were not statistically significant, Gore suggests faculty and student affairs collaboration on the design and delivery of FYE courses may improve the course, and thus retention rates; citing Hunter and Murray (2007), Gore suggests "…student affairs staff can help faculty better understand student development issues, and faculty can help student affairs staff learn teaching techniques and pedagogy" (p. 33, as cited in Gore, 2012). Gore recommends team teaching between faculty and student affairs should be considered where possible; if not possible due to lack of resources, he suggests institutions bring student affairs and student services into the classroom.

Stelnicki, Nordstokke, and Saklofske (2015) explained the unique vantage point held by student affairs staff such as academic advisors, providing them with an emic perspective of the

personal characteristics and experiences that underlie student success and failure. Recognizing this advantage, Alvarez and Towne (2016) explored solutions to identify a gap in capacity, whereby many student affairs staff lack classroom or instructional training. Although no conclusions were drawn, their exploration of how to build teaching capacity in student affairs staff provides further insight into the FYE phenomenon, revealing staff and faculty can be experts in all or some of the following: subject matter, student development, and/or teaching and learning.

Regardless of whether it is faculty or student affairs professionals teaching the FYE course, facilitators need to connect students with services and supports, make learning meaningful by teaching the whole student, scaffold students' academic and non-academic skill development, build faculty capacity, and move toward sustainable approaches to student success.

Connect students with services and supports. Cuseo (2003; 2014) recognizes connecting students with services and supports occurs as part of orientation, but advocates for something deeper, suggesting through intentional course assignment design, faculty can support students to make these connections; for example, assignments could require students to participate in a specified number of on campus co-curricular experiences followed by a reflection on the experience to prompt deep processing; such intentional design would provide students with twice as much time to engage with learning and promote their content integration, orientation, and learning into and through post-secondary.

Make learning meaningful. Extending beyond purpose to meaning, educational psychologist Carl Rogers (1974) argues learning must be meaningful to the learner if it is to be significant. Rogers describes two common learning experiences: cognitive and affective. When they converge learning becomes unified, and therefore meaningful. Rogers (1974) argues unified

learning rarely happens, and states "perhaps learning experiences can be judged by their closeness or remoteness to this" (p.104). Similar to Rogers' understanding of learning, the FYE course is in essence about the affective and the cognitive converging, to support the holistic growth of the student. I believe Rogers would argue decision-makers and faculty who support the holistic approach of a FYE course are more likely to acknowledge learning does truly encompass ideas and feelings. Rogers states,

> It pays to be personal and human in the classroom. A humane atmosphere is not only more pleasant for all concerned. It promotes more-and more significant- learning. When attitudes of realness, respect for the individual, understanding of the student's private world are present, exciting things happen. (p. 110)

This importance of educating the whole student affirms meeting student's needs within the context of the classroom has the power to yield more significant learning: learning that matters more deeply.

Scaffold academic and non-academic skill development. In addition to connecting students with the supports available on campus, faculty need to be equipped to effectively scaffold students' academic and non-academic development. Gabriel (2008) states "since many professors were strong students they may be at a loss when it comes to assisting an unprepared or at-risk student" (p. 58); as a result, subject matter expert faculty might struggle to teach study skills and designing the type of holistic and therapeutic environment deemed to be effective. Porter and Swing (2006) lend insight into the unique skill set required of FYE course instructors:

> …faculty often report that their least favorite part of first-year seminars is teaching study skills, and that the area they feel least prepared for is the counseling aspect of helping students develop holistically. (p. 107)

These findings suggest faculty's prior experiences as students, combined with their level of preparedness to teach some aspects such as study skills and act as a pseudo-counsellor, may have an effect on both their experience teaching the course and the student experience.

Huff and Burek (2016) assessed an FYE course at their institution revealing similar findings; advising, scheduling, and learning to effectively navigate resources were the most beneficial aspects of students' FYE course experiences. The faculty teaching the course were graduate students who met individually with students to advise and responded to students' journal entries and written assignments. In addition, associate deans met weekly with the faculty teaching the course to provide personal and professional support in the form of mentoring. This dual-mentoring model offers a unique whole campus approach, involving administration in course delivery, supporting course participants, and building capacity in faculty, as further discussed below.

Build faculty capacity. Regardless of whether an FYE course is being taught by a student affairs professional, faculty of another discipline, graduate students, or in partnership with administration, the importance of professional development for faculty is commonly cited or recommended in the literature (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2004; Fink, 2013; Jessup-Anger, 2011; Litteral & Taylor, 2015). Gardner (1980) reviewed an FYE course integrating a mandatory 40-hour faculty training program, and found many faculty sought out the experience, developed their affective skills and a supportive network, and learned about the institution, which reduced the institutional barriers between themselves and student affairs staff. Student affairs professionals, Gardner argues might possess some of these same skills, largely as a function of their daily work, and faculty, who are willing to develop this knowledge, may very well be able to deliver FYE courses effectively.

Highlighting the importance of faculty engagement and development, Cavote and Kopera-Frye (2004) recommend staff and faculty development, evaluation of program effectiveness, and time be offered when implementing subject-based FYE courses. They argue extending faculty understandings on transitional issues is imperative, as is their understanding of student services and appropriate referrals; in the case of optional FYE courses, they recommend involving faculty in advising and supporting student selection of FYE courses. Further, they believe subject-based FYE courses should be taught using a standardized curriculum with a means to assess content differences among courses. Jessup-Anger (2011) examined the motivation of students in pass or fail first year seminar classes and found administrators and course instructors need to carefully consider the instructional, motivational, and developmental strategies required to motivate students in first-year seminars; in his view, the full potential of FYE courses will be envisioned when "instructors have the curricular and motivational resources they need in order to be successful" (p. 115).

Jessup-Anger (2011) suggests instructor capacity to acquire the necessary instructional, motivational, and developmental strategies to support the FYE course experience should be an ongoing discussion at the institutional level. Ehrenberg and Zhang (2005) suggest students who are engaged with full-time tenure track faculty are more likely to persist, a finding that may be connected to the ripple effect of instruction delivered by faculty of whom the institution has invested developmental time and energy. The research also alludes to a potential unintended, but positive effect of providing support and professional development to FYE course faculty: supporting faculty in building the skills required to effectively teach an FYE course might have a trickle-down effect, with the instructional gains or pedagogical realizations flowing into their other courses.

Litteral and Taylor (2015) investigated not only the student experience, but also faculty's experience with one FYE course in order to better understand how faculty view their role, the challenges they encounter, and the effect that teaching an FYE course had on their instructional and pedagogical approaches. They refer to the "pedagogical epiphany" (p. 74) experienced by faculty while teaching a subject-based (business) first year seminar – what they describe as the shift from "a paradigm of instruction to one of learning" (p. 77), an epiphany that undoubtedly affected faculty's pedagogical approach in their discipline.

Move toward sustainable approaches. More contemporary understandings of educational sustainability build on this humanistic and constructivist view of learning as a social process, responsible for more than knowledge transmission, slowing shaping and transforming the identity of the learner (Dewey, 1916; 1938/1997; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). Aligned with the critical theory informing the ontological and epistemological orientation of this study, contemporary theories of educational sustainability broaden our understanding of the role higher education has in identity construction, suggesting global citizenship and social responsibility emerges when developing the affective domain. Paralleling the FYE conversation, educational sustainability calls for a new curriculum. Wright, Cain, and Monsour (2015) propose a model embedding sustainable skills and mindsets across the curriculum. In addition, through the use of transformational pedagogical practices, such as Freire's (1970) problem-posing dialogue, they advocate for curriculum inviting students to engage as active "change agents" in their personal, local and global communities (Wright et al., 2015, p. 3).

This conversation on educational sustainability provides insight into the role higher education plays in developing the affective domain and begins to suggest how curricula might best achieve this mandate. Wright et al. (2015) argue for a critical pedagogy of sustainability,

whereby students are scaffolded toward praxis through a "curriculum that is creative, fluent, and meaningful in the largest sense," an education they argue moves the conversation "beyond sustainability" (p. 3). They note that although progress is being made, few colleges or universities are embedding educational sustainability curricular change throughout the undergraduate curriculum, suggesting these initiatives are most often added on, or taught in isolation, much like cognitive learning skills. Similar to the FYE course conversation, whereby the goal is to nurture the student's cognitive and affective growth, the efforts, as some might suggest have been siloed or tasked to the FYE course. Wright et al. (2015) note isolation, although easier, is not as effective as integration:

> However powerful the orientation seminar or first year experiences can be, the sustainability conversation needs to be woven across the fabric of the undergraduate curriculum. Not only does the method of embedding sustainability throughout the curriculum impact the most students, but is necessary to scaffold sustainability literacy. (p. 4)

As such, I would suggest students' academic and non-academic skill development is deserving of the same statement, where the conversation becomes "woven across the fabric of the [entire program] curriculum," rather than resting within the confines of an FYE course.

Chapter Summary

Student persistence, student development, and student success are multi-faceted, and the research on persistence does not provide any one simple solution to supporting post-secondary completion. It does, however, provide insight into institutions' ability to, through a lens of student development and success, proactively plan supports, resources, and curricular experiences that nurture students' academic and non-academic development, both of which are

linked closely to college completion and a myriad of other positive outcomes. One such first-year program is the first-year experience course, which has the potential to support student transition into and through post-secondary as evidenced by measures of persistence, GPA, and student satisfaction. As a result, FYE courses are in process of implementation at many institutions across the country and remain a longstanding tradition in American institutions.

As has been shown throughout the literature, the qualitative voice of students could provide great insight into the phenomena of transferable learning skills and help guide faculty to make learning more applicable; listening in to students could also hone in on the skills and abilities that are most meaningful in an FYE course, impact future learning, and thus, have the greatest cumulative effect on student success. Vander Schee (2011), in reference to studies that link FYE courses and increased student motivation, suggests future research explore if this increased motivation trickles into other classes. This inquiry is a response to that call. Additionally, little insight on the faculty experience exists, which makes decisions about faculty selection and meaningful professional development difficult.

Due to the complexities of student development, and the challenges unique to first year students, pedagogical and curricular approaches to FYE courses, and students' experiences in these courses, are of the utmost importance. To date, little has been unearthed about students and faculty experiences in these courses, particularly in mandatory FYE courses in Canadian certificate and diploma programs. By exploring these experiences with one particular FYE course, a more detailed picture can be painted about how one FYE course is understood, experienced, and enacted.

CHAPTER THREE: A METHODOLOGY GROUNDED IN EMPOWERMENT, EMANCIPATION, AND EQUITY

> *Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end.*
>
> ~hooks (1994, p. 61)

Introductory Remarks

As a feminist, I am naturally drawn to critical and caring ways of doing and being, an approach that has naturally found its way into my identity as a researcher. This worldview informs my epistemological and methodological orientation, drawing me toward approaches that frame research from the inside or individual out (emic), rather than the outside or world in (etic). Grounded in feminist and critical ontology, I assumed the role of "passionate participant" (p. 101), actively co-constructing knowledge with students and faculty to ensure the data was reflective of their lived realities (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) and their voices, traditionally silenced in the literature, were brought to the forefront. Using student development theory and what is already known, this inquiry sought to explore how FYE courses are experienced and understood from the emic perspectives of both faculty and students, exploring how student success is contextualized and supported in the context of the FYE course in an effort to improve the teaching and learning experience.

Methodological Framework

Quantitative research on post-secondary retention and attrition has resulted in numerous student success interventions (Tinto, 2012), largely due to metrics seeking to measure, in an effort to understand, the gravity and complexity of the student attrition puzzle. My theoretical worldview and my prior experiences as a learning strategist, teacher, and student affairs

professional, as well as my identity as a feminist and activist, has resulted in an approach rooted in empowerment, emancipation, and equity (Freire, 1970, 1993, 1997; Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 1998; hooks, 1989, 1994, 2000, Smith, 2005), alongside an active construction of meaning viewing education as growth and transformation, both of which are foundational to student success in post-secondary education (Bruner, 1968; Dewey, 1916, 1938/1997; Piaget, 1964, 1970; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Plato, 1892/1920/1937; Vygotsky, 1978). Student development theory supports my innate desire to move beyond the cognitive needs of students and support their affective needs (Chickering, 1972; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993, 2012).

My ethical and moral commitment as a certified teacher is deeply engrained in my professional identity, resulting in an approach grounded in the ethical standards of care, trust, respect, and integrity (OCT, 2020). Further, The Student Affairs and Services Competency Model (CACUSS, 2020) guides my growth and development as a student affairs professional, encouraging me to continually evolve my skills in the area of emotional and interpersonal intelligence, post-secondary acumen, equity, diversity, and inclusion. As a result of my commitment to my professional role as teacher and student affairs practitioner, I have always felt a responsibility to evolve practices in support of student success. Naturally, throughout my doctoral studies, my reflective process transitioned into one of deeper contemplation; I shifted from questions of how and why to questions of so what and now what. This wisdom seeking, inspired by mentors, advisors, and professors led me toward qualitative methods, aligning my theoretical and methodological approach with what I believe, and the difference I want to make.

Adopting a qualitative methodology allowed me to reflect on my work as a student affairs practitioner and awakened me to the value of my emic perspective. I began to reflect on the degree to which this perspective on the student experience reflexively informed my own practice

in student affairs, allowing me to work with an intimate knowledge of students' lived realities and struggles, and ask if this was the very tool students valued most in my practice. I came to realize this was the voice missing from the practice literature, which resulted in faculty support and development, curricular and instructional approaches, and institutional decisions often void of the faculty and student experience. As a learning strategist, the stories faculty and students shared with me revealed the ways in which the classroom and institution could support them, unravelling the many assumptions underlying student success.

My ontological commitment toward empowerment, constructed meaning, and support for the holistic needs of the whole student guided me toward methods emphasizing the socially constructed nature of our human reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I realized the quantitative designs, traditionally found in the literature, would not allow me to get to the heart of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions associated with student success and the FYE course experience. Nor would it aid in contextualizing the challenges of college students, and potential of FYE courses in supporting student success. Rather, by selecting qualitative methods I chose to accept the responsibility of using my words to tell the story of one FYE course. This "epistemological break" (Lather, 1986, p. 64) from objective and quantitative research, toward an inclusive subjectivity honouring the researcher experience and the lived realities of participants, felt natural and inclusive of my professional and personal identities.

Using qualitative methods, this inquiry exposes experiences and connects individual parts to a larger whole (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 1990; VanMaanen, 2011). Acknowledging objective reality cannot be captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005); qualitative case study allows for the embodied knowing of many actors to contextualize and bring to life the complexity of student persistence (Brady, 2005), creating a "bricolage" (p. 4) of representations to illuminate

the challenges and best practices for supporting first-semester students, specifically in the context of a first-year experience course. Case study design, as will be described below, provides a flexible research framework, which could unearth the context-dependent knowledge needed to expose experiences and connect individual parts of the FYE phenomenon to a larger whole (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 1990; VanMaanen, 2011).

Case Study Design

Case study research is conducive to explorations that are descriptive or explanatory, which makes it an appropriate method to both describe students' experience and explain how the course is understood and perceived by other stakeholders (Yin, 2014; 2018). Merriam (1998) explains case study research often holistically and descriptively explores a specific event, program, or process using data that is coordinated and collected from multiple sources (Stake, 1995). In this inquiry, data was obtained from faculty and students, as well as existing documentation such as the written curriculum, syllabi, and the course outline. Case study research allows the research unit to be defined, creating boundaries around the phenomenon or experience being studied (Yin, 2014). As Stake (2005) suggests, "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (p. 443). The use of case study design allowed for the FYE course experience at one medium-sized Ontario college to be explored, whereby experimental research design would work to isolate a phenomenon from its context (Zainal, 2007). This inquiry sought to explore the FYE course within its intricate web of variables, recognizing the phenomenon could not be understood apart from the wider institutional context.

Flyvbjerg (2001) suggests case study research produces the context-dependent knowledge necessary for the advancement of thinking, allowing this research inquiry to unearth

the student and faculty understandings paving the way for future action-oriented work to evolve student supports, curriculum, and pedagogical and instructional practices. Stake (2005) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental cases affirming there is "no hard-and-fast line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose" (p. 445). Although this case study aligns with the goals of an instrumental case study, whereby it sheds light on the phenomenon of supporting students' transition, it aligns most closely with intrinsic case study design as the case itself was of interest (Stake, 2005). Rather than seek to generalize, this inquiry sought to stay focused on unearthing what could be known about the case; seeking to "understand the case itself" (p. 448) was prioritized over theorizing or generalizing. In an effort to tell the story of the faculty and students, and help readers "understand the case itself" (p. 448), ethnographic interviewing was used to guide data collection to tell participant's stories and perspectives of the FYE course, and as a result, the ways of knowing and doing that accompany these understandings.

Ethnographic-Inspired Methods

Though the use of case study design allowed for an exploration of the FYE phenomenon, it did not clearly define how data should be collected. For this, I turned to ethnography. My first encounter with ethnography, in a first-year cultural anthropology course discussing Mead's (1961) *Coming of Age in Samoa*, painted a picture in my mind of the researcher as an outside observer studying the other. As a doctoral student with a new understanding of the positionality and potential of ethnography to be a study with people, rather than on or of people (Smith, 2005), I was inspired by its ability to honour and listen to the voices of my participants (Parr, 2008), and to collaboratively make meaning of an important experience in higher education: that of the first-year experience (FYE) course.

The ethnographer records and recounts participants' emic perspectives, arriving at a rich and multi-layered understanding, what anthropologist Geertz (1973) refers to as "thick description" (p. 6). Geertz states doing ethnography is much like reading a manuscript providing "transient examples of shaped behavior" (p. 10), most often in the form of written representation (Van Maanen, 2011). The ethnographer prioritizes the experiences of people, recognizing people's lives are a string of stories, tales of their deconstructed experiences, understood and modified through the act of telling their story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1992, 1994, 2000; Shaw, 2003). This inspired the use of a flexible research design and semi-structured interview protocol, to unearth an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Through this process the faculty and student experience was turned into an account (Geertz, 1973) that could be consulted for the purpose of presenting this research in a way that may become a critical medium through which the pedagogical and instructional approaches of the FYE course could be explored or re-envisioned in the future.

I was also inspired by ethnographic methods when determining how the stories of the many actors involved would be told (Iloh & Tierney, 2014). Van Maanen, (2011) speaks of the expert skill required to authentically do research and then present that research; in particular, discusses the particularities of realist and confessional tales, both of which I feel are relevant to this inquiry. Realist tales are typically accounts of the story, written as realistically as possible, often in the third person, capturing the voices of the participants with the researcher simply acting as a conduit for the tale. Van Maanen (2011) states that "neutrality characterizes the realist tale" (p. 47). Confessional tales, on the other hand, implicate the researcher and their perspectives and subjectivities within the account of what was researched and what was found; they are typically written in the first person. I embraced neutrality as I worked to be non-judging

and non-striving, while at the same time interrogating my personal and professional assumptions and beliefs about who my participants (faculty and students) are and what constitutes their experiences.

Resisting the urge to be paralyzed by this consciousness, I recognized the need to "confess" my subjectivities. Puente and Bender (2015) state "consciously recognizing and acknowledging your personal perspectives helps reduce (not increase) subjectivity and bias" (p. 56). Through the act of critical self-reflection and journaling my confessional tale, I reflected on my assumptions (see pages 1 & 81), and worked to identify how these assumptions enter into my work (Brookfield, 1987). As I leaned into the subjectivities of qualitative research, I became increasingly conscious of the data I was producing and my interpretations of my participants experiences. The need to balance the realist and the confessional informed the way I gathered data, interpreted data, and ultimately represented data in this dissertation.

Drawing on my secular mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1991; 1994; 2003) helped me tell the realist tale. I aimed to be fully present and authentic as I listened deeply to participants; I consistently invited my research participants to show up and be seen in the recounts of their experiences. Puente and Bender (2015) discuss how mindfulness can invite researchers to practice with greater intentionality and reflexivity, suggesting:

> As with reflective practice, mindfulness invites us to fully consider our ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions for each evaluation we undertake. When we conduct evaluation mindfully, we avoid operating on autopilot by giving careful attention to *what* we are doing, *why* we are doing it, and *how* we are doing it. (p. 52, emphasis in original)

My Confessional Tale

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest qualitative research situates the researcher in the world, making the ordinary visible in new or different ways. In my role as a student affairs professional and faculty member at the institution under study, I entered into this research already immersed in the community, knowing and speaking their language (Fontana & Frey, 1994), eager to explore the known in new and different ways. My research journal became a site of critical self-reflection, where I explored my positionality, "confessing" how I understood the FYE course phenomenon and questioning what I knew to be true. This confessional tale, as captured in my research journal, traces my evolution in understanding, whereby the experiences of my participants extended my knowledge and allowed me to arrive at new understandings.

Throughout my doctoral coursework and residencies, and in particular in my *Reflective Practice* course, I was prompted to reflect on my ontological beliefs by exploring the multiple realities informing what is known about the faculty and student experience in higher education. For example, at the onset of this journey, informed by work with students, I predicted a lack of student readiness, and hypothesized faculty might struggle to tune into this lack of preparedness:

> My inquiry is positioned around the idea that student persistence in post-secondary education is multi-faceted and the very reasons why students leave college are not the same as why they stay. Many students arrive in post-secondary underprepared; one of the ways in which this emerges is in their lack of academic skills such as reading comprehension, note-taking, finding and evaluating research, studying and test-taking, synthesizing information, academic writing, and often most apparent – time management and ability to manage procrastination. This converges with the rise of university and graduate level educated college faculty who use their experiences as students to develop

> their expectations for their students, in my experience and opinion, often failing to consider the difference in preparedness between college, university and graduate students. (Research Journal, July 4, 2016)

Recognizing the value-laden nature of qualitative research, critical-self-reflection offered an opportunity to identify my beliefs, which provided a written account of how they might enter my work as a researcher. As captured in my research journal, I set off on this inquiry wondering if a prescriptive FYE curriculum may neglect the actual needs of the learners, marginalizing the diverse students in today's college classrooms. I started with the beliefs and assumptions outlined in Chapter 1, but throughout the research process, my understanding naturally evolved, as my participants challenged what I thought to be true. While analyzing the data, I was able to revisit this narrative to question my own values, assumptions, and beliefs to arrive at new ways of understanding, informed by the lived realities of my participants. For example, full-time faculty challenged my assumption that the FYE course was being taught in a way that was hypothetical or disconnected from students' subject matter; part-time faculty helped me to understand deeply the challenges and struggles I had not experienced as a student affairs practitioner and full-time employee, and students challenged many things I believed to be true, all the while affirming the unique role faculty play in their experience.

By journaling my confessional tale and through continuous self-reflection, I remained conscious of my position of power and privilege in this research and recognized the results and discussion of this research are my interpretation and my truth; in a sense, I began to see my work: as "second-order, textualized, fieldworker-dependent version of the events" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 95). As a result, I employed member-checking practices throughout each stage of my work in order to produce an authentic account of events that captured my participants' tales as

realistically as possible. I fully recognize, however, even amidst an emancipatory or mindful approach, researchers have "the final word on how the culture is to be interpreted and presented" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 51). This interpretive omnipotence (p. 51) challenged me to consider how my decisions would impact the story I ultimately told as a researcher and led me to consider the details, narratives, or voices—included or omitted—throughout this dissertation.

As Stake (2005) suggests, the "brainwork" (p. 449) of qualitative case research is both observational and reflective. In Chapter Four, I present the data in a way I hope allows readers to lean into and form their own understandings and in Chapter Five, I share my interpretations, reflecting deeper on the ways in which my own values, assumptions and beliefs were challenged, and discussing the implications of the findings on teaching and learning.

Inquiry Design

Due to the uniqueness of this inquiry, an in-depth exploration of a particular course within a particular medium-sized Ontario college, I first approached the program coordinators and the relevant associate dean, asking for their support in conducting a research inquiry within one particular mandatory three-credit FYE course nested in a one-year certificate program. After garnering administrative support, I applied for ethical approval at Nipissing University followed by an application at the host institution.

Recruitment

Due to institutional rules surrounding participant recruitment, a variety of methods were employed to maximize participation. Informed by my desire to explore the FYE course phenomenon while respecting my dual role as a researcher and college employee, arm's length recruitment and purposeful sampling were employed as described below.

As a researcher engaged in emergent and reflexive research, it is important to assume responsibility for how my actions and research practices affect the lives of my collaborators (Hilsen, 2006). Due to my dual-position as both a researcher and employee at the institution of study, it was important participants, particularly those with whom I have daily contact, were free to decline participation. I solicited a neutral third-party recruiter and consciously did not discuss my research with those invited to participate in order to avoid a situation whereby my co-workers felt compelled or obligated to participate. This arms-length process allowed participants to decline the invitation without feeling accountable to me, as colleague, as researcher, or college employee.

The desire for a focused and in-depth understanding of FYE courses guided the sample selection. Patton (1990) argues "information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 169) must be purposefully selected. As a researcher I asked, "Whose voice needs to be heard?" and allowed this to guide my participant selection through maximum variation sampling, a sub-strategy of purposeful sampling, that maximizes variation, and compensates for the heterogeneity of a small sample size by applying the following principle, "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experience and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program" (p. 173). Although a seemingly diverse group, participants included faculty, students, and myself as researcher and student affairs professional.

Faculty. Informed by my student affairs experience, I worked with the program coordinator to identify a list of potential faculty participants within the academic area and to generate a list of past and present practitioners who might be interested in participating. Using this purposive technique, I leveraged the Centre for Applied Research at the institution of study,

who emailed 20 potential staff and faculty participants the recruitment notice and the participant information letter (See Appendix One). An article inviting participants was also placed on the staff news portal, providing an overview of the inquiry; interested participants were invited to connect with the researcher for further information and were provided with the Faculty and Staff Participant Information Letter. Staff and faculty were not compensated for their time; when full-time staff members participated, however, I endeavoured to complete interviews during their working hours.

Students. The student announcement tool within the learning management system was used to post an electronic announcement to all students in the program of study, inviting approximately 600 students to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Interested students were emailed the recruitment letter and the participant information letter (See Appendix Two) with an invitation to ask questions about the inquiry and/or their participation. Students were informed that participation was voluntary and non-evaluative, and that there would be no impact on participants' roles or grades if they declined participation. They were offered compensation in the form of a $15 gift certificate, the amount of which was determined based on the minimum wage value of one hour of time and/or the value of travelling to campus and paying for parking. Student participants who withdrew during the inquiry were compensated for their time.

On two occasions, students shared the inquiry information with friends. This snowball sampling method yielded two additional participants: one who had graduated from the preparatory program being examined and one who had completed the first-semester and was in the process of bridging to a different area of study.

Participants

Faculty. Five participants identified as FYE course faculty at the time of this inquiry, with expertise and experience in diverse areas (for example, one identified themselves as science teacher, another as a professional nurse educator, and three others in other post-secondary program areas. In addition, three shared they had formal training in teaching and learning (Bachelors or Master's degrees in Education). As an added layer of anonymity, their pseudonyms will not be linked to their demographic profiles. Two of the faculty had permanent full-time roles within the post-secondary institution, and three others identified as part-time or partial-load employees. Two of the faculty identified prior experience in learning strategy or counselling-type roles, sharing tales of having supported students one-on-one with academic and social issues pertaining to the transition into post-secondary studies.

Students. Five participants identified as students in various programs within the health-science umbrella at the institution under study. There was great diversity in where students were in the life cycle of their post-secondary career. At the time of this inquiry, Sandy and Jordan identified as currently enrolled in the one-year preparatory pre-health sciences program; they had recently completed the FYE course. Everest and Ellis had completed the FYE course within the last year, and Tyler had completed the FYE course over a year ago; these participants offered a unique vantage point, bringing their reflections on the skills and knowledge learned in the FYE course as it informed their academic journey beyond the course.

Additional demographic information emerged during the interviews, providing insight into the depth and breadth of participants' experiences. Ellis and Tyler identified English was not their first language, and although only Tyler identified as an International student, both made reference to adapting to the Canadian post-secondary system. Sandy and Jordan identified as mature and parents, with Sandy identifying as a lone parent. Although at the time of interview,

all five participants were enrolled in health-science programs, Everest indicated as a result of the first-year experience course, they had decided to pursue an alternative post-secondary program. Since the conclusion of my data collection, three of the participants interviewed have maintained contact, visiting from time-to-time to share their insights on the student experience. Each student's unique experience with the FYE course is detailed in Chapter Four, alongside other demographic details, as they relate to their lived experiences in the FYE course.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, a review of the course curriculum, and ongoing research notes.

Semi-structured interviews. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants. Participants were offered telephone or in-person options; all but one participant choose to meet face-to-face. Interviews were conducted on campus, and in a private space negotiated with each participant. The length of interviews ranged from 40-90 minutes. The in-person interview environment was comfortable and relaxed, with the interviewer sitting beside participants to establish rapport and an equitable balance of power. Fontana and Frey (1994) state because the goal of semi- and unstructured interviews is one of understanding, establishing rapport is of prime importance. They underscore the importance of the researcher accepting a reciprocal role of participant, "rather than impos[ing] the world of academia and preconceptions upon them" (p. 367). During the face-to-face interviews, after approximately five minutes, I signalled the interview would begin by turning on the audio-recorder. One participant from a satellite campus participated. My initial phone interview and follow up face-to-face conversational interview with this participant were not audio recorded to honour the comfort of the participant.

Recognizing the emergent and reflexive nature of qualitative research methodology and methods, consent was an ongoing process of negotiation between researcher and participants (Parr & Elliot-Johns, personal communication, July, 2016). Participants completed a consent form explaining how data would be handled, confidentiality maintained, and the complexities surrounding anonymity. At the beginning of the interview, participants were invited to ask questions, and reminded the interview could be terminated at any time with no penalty. Each participant was provided a copy of the letter for their own records, although some declined to take a copy with them. Each student participant was remunerated with a gift card regardless of whether they chose to end the interview or leave early. Those who consented to audio-recording of the interviews to facilitate accurate transcription of responses were invited to check transcriptions for accuracy approximately three weeks after the interview.

Denzin (2001) suggests the interview itself has the potential to be an act of transformation, creating opportunities for social change through reflexivity and the interaction between the participant and researcher. In line with my feminist commitment, I employed a semi-structured interview protocol, whereby "[i]nterviewers can show their human side and answer questions and express feelings" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 370). This also allowed me to prioritize the voices of faculty and student participants and reduce the hierarchical nature of interviews, especially when talking with women, whose stories, histories and recounts are significant in understanding various phenomenon.

Interview questions. In line with best practices for semi-structured interviews outlined by Flyan (2005), questions were developed to guide an in-depth exploration, while simultaneously creating space and opportunity for flexibility. Without flexibility in my interview, I feared I would be excluding the personal narrative (standpoint) of the teacher or student, and the essence

of their experience would not be captured authentically (Smith, 2005). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggest the use of six to ten open-ended questions to facilitate the exploration of an issue, while keeping the interviews to a reasonable length for participants. Questions (See Figure 3.1) were developed for faculty and students as starting points, with follow-up questions and probes emerging dependent on participant responses.

Number of interviews. In total, ten sets of interviews were conducted. Recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and measures were taken to obscure any identifiable locations, timelines, or individuals revealed during the interviews. For example, many students interviewed identified their faculty by name. These names were removed from the transcripts and replaced with the pronoun "they" or "them." This was agreed upon by participants during member checking.

Figure 3.1

Interview questions

Faculty	*Students*
1. *What is your position within the college and what is your connection to the FYE course Success Strategies for Pre-Health and Beyond?* 2. *What, from your vantage point, are the intended outcomes of participation in this FYE course?* 3. *Do you think the FYE course supports student learning and success in the students' current certificate program? If so, describe the ways in which it supports learning. If not, why?* 4. *Do you think the FYE course supports student learning in their future program of study? If so, describe the ways in which it supports their future learning. If not, why do you think this is?* 5. *What transitional challenges (social and/or academic) do you think are addressed within the FYE course (social or academic)? Are there any you think are not addressed in the context of the course?*	1. Describe your experience in the FYE course *Success in Pre-Health and Beyond*. 2. Where are you on your academic journey at this moment in time? 3. The goal of the course is to support student success. What does success look like to you in college now? (or, How do you define success in college?) 4. Were you able to apply what you learned in the FYE course to your other more challenging courses? 5. If you could redesign the course to make it more useful, what would that look like? 6. One of the most challenging tasks for teachers is to get into the heads of students. What advice or wisdom would you give to someone teaching this course?

6. *What, from your vantage point, would you change about the design and delivery of the FYE course Success Strategies for Pre-Health and Beyond?*
7. *What, if any, are the instructional and pedagogical challenges with this course?*

Member checking was employed in attempt to reduce misinterpretation (Thomas, 2017). Guba and Lincoln (1989) have called into question the ability of member checking to remove bias, reminding qualitative researchers participant understandings should be viewed as ever-evolving. Member checking was, therefore, used to ensure the interview data provided an interpretation that resonated with the participant; it also provided an opportunity to reconnect with each participant, and in a few instances, participants added depth and breadth to their stories in the form of written text. As DeCino and Waallkes (2019) suggest "[r]esearchers should not view member checks with participants as a thoughtless procedure on a checklist, but rather as unique encounters with countless outcomes. By so doing, researchers model and promote sound researcher ethics" (p. 382).

Transcripts were sent to participants for member-checking through email. Each participant was invited to either correspond via email or schedule a short follow-up meeting. Participants were invited to add detail, further comment, clarify meaning, or identify areas for deletion. Suggested changes were made, and a revised pdf document was saved, replacing the originally transcribed document. Each interview participant was assigned a gender-neutral pseudonym, which was then used throughout the presentation of research findings, as described in Chapter One.

The course curriculum. Drawing on ethnographic principles expanded my focus to "*all* the ways one may direct attention while in the field" (Wolcott, 1999, p. 43, emphasis in original). The course curriculum, as detailed here, does not compose the core of the dataset, but rather complements my understanding of the FYE experience, and objectively expands the field, in

order to provide a more "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) of the FYE course. Although I wanted the voice of my participants to be strong, the interpretation of artifacts allowed for a more fulsome story to be told. This bricolage (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011) of data collection procedures allowed me to contextualize and situate the story being told in the research interviews, alongside the intended experience of the course.

In collaboration with research participants, I obtained electronic and print copies of existing documentation including the course outline and the course textbook. The textbook was referred to by some as "the curriculum", and as such was consulted to provide depth and breadth to the teaching and learning experience. During the interviews, some faculty shared their personal course syllabi that guided classroom instruction, and some students shared learning materials, course readings, and their textbook, all to help contextualize the conversation and ground their story.

Research journal. I was introduced to journal writing during my doctoral residency, a practice providing me the space to explore the intersectionality between my assumptions and subjectivities, the theoretical and scholarly conversation of my coursework, and my understanding and practice in student affairs and in the classroom. This journal became the medium through which I made meaning and many of the musings explored throughout this writing led to this inquiry. As Goodall Jr. (2000) suggests, a personal diary, as such, can teach aspiring ethnographers the skill of detailed notetaking and allow for a recount of "*yourself* as data" (emphasis in original, p. 88). Keeping a journal to document my research process felt like a natural extension of this writing process.

During my interviews, I recorded what I observed and heard, aiming to detail what the moment looked like, sounded like, and felt like. Through this process, I aimed to cultivate a

present-moment awareness, allowing me to hear and see my participant fully, and in an effort to remind myself of the little moments when I later transcribed each interview. My research journal provided a recount of what I saw and heard in the interviews, and as Goodall Jr. (2000) suggests, provided a reminder of what we, as researchers, have been drawn to, while serving to keep us mindful of how we arrive at knowing throughout the research process.

Upon the conclusion of each interview I revisited my notes, substantiating and expanding on the ideas contained within, and recording my own musings and interpretations. As such, my research journal provided a written recount of my interpretation and reflection on each interview. My research journal allowed me a space to draw a dotted line between the experiences of my participants, and my own perceptions and understandings as a teacher and student affairs professional. Within my journal I was able to trace my own evolution of thinking, providing a recount of what I was "*attracted to*" and "*convinced by*" (emphasis in original, Goodall Jr., 2000, p. 87). Further, it provided a "*grammatical map of the mental and emotional territory*" (emphasis in original, p. 88) allowing me to more clearly distinguish my thoughts and experiences from those of my participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was chosen for its active and flexible approach, where rather than prevalence ruling, there was space for the research question to guide the analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Patton, 1990). Although driven primarily by the research question, thematic analysis allows space for the research question to evolve through the analysis process. Aligned with the constructivist epistemology guiding my work as a researcher, I was actively involved in the analysis process, where meaning could be made and the story of the data could be told. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a clear demarcation on how to apply the thematic analysis method,

what they refer to as a "recipe" for data analysis (p. 78), consisting of clearly explained steps, which were applied in this inquiry. This method is known for being flexible and structured in a way allowing the research to be evaluated and replicated.

As summarized in the Figure 3.2, Phase One was completed simultaneously with both data sets (faculty and students). Faculty and student interviews were treated as unique data sets in Phases Two, Three, and Four, beginning with the faculty data set. Phase Five was then completed for both data sets, whereby the themes were defined and named, as will be presented in the results (Chapter Four).

Figure 3.2

Data analysis process using thematic analysis

All Data	Phase One	Transcription and member checking
Faculty Data	Phase Two	Initial identification of codes
	Phase Three	Sorting of codes into themes
	Phase Four	Telling the story of the data
Student Data	Phase Two	Initial identification of codes
	Phase Three	Sorting of codes into themes
	Phase Four	Telling the story of the data
All Data	Phase Five	Defining and naming the themes
	Phase Six	Producing the report

The first phase of data analysis process began as I listened to each interview numerous times during the transcription process. This allowed me to gain familiarity with the data, whereby themes naturally started to emerge, forming the "bedrock for the rest of the analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Immersed in the data, I also became both intimate and active with the *data corpus* (all data) (p. 79). After the member checking process was complete, the interviews, course curriculum, and course outlines were printed out, allowing for the data to be

read and re-read, complementing my tactile and visual learning style, while making space for me to generate initial codes (Phase Two).

Faculty data. In the second phase of data analysis. I began with faculty data, reading hard copies of the four interview transcripts multiple times, highlighting recurring words, concepts, and ideas as I began to assign codes. I allowed as many codes and patterns to emerge as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I was committed to unearthing as much of the conversation as possible, balancing this with a trust the data would take me where I needed to go (M. Parr, personal communication, July 2015). Codes were identified without any restrictions with the sole intent of making meaning and describing the FYE course phenomenon. Throughout the process, I remained curious and open to the various themes, both expected and unexpected. Each code, once assigned, was constantly compared to the uncoded data. Boyatzis (1998) argues a "good code" (p. 1) offers a thick qualitative description of the phenomenon being studied, and in the case of this research inquiry, codes such as "time" began to paint a very rich picture of what was important to participants, in relation to their experiences and how they conceptualize success.

After the initial codes emerged, a third phase of the analysis of the faculty data began. The data, divided by the individual codes was physically sorted into themes (See Figure 3.3) by way of a mind map, allowing me to conceptually see the bigger picture, allowing me to simultaneously see how the themes strung together the story of the data (Phase Four). Some themes were collapsed with others, while some data was recoded; recoding ceased when it was no longer adding anything substantial (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Figure 3.3

Faculty data themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Role and Purpose of the FYE course	- Teaching students how to learn and scaffolding academic success - Supporting the student transition
Pedagogical and Instructional Approaches	- Role of faculty as coach or mentor - Making learning relevant - Making learning transferable
Challenges and Opportunities	- Time - Capacity - Perceived value - Support - Curriculum - Physical space/ class size

Student data. After arriving at Phase Four with the faculty data, I circled back to begin Phase Two (initial identification of codes) with the student data set, reading and rereading each of the interview transcripts. Again, I allowed recurring words, concepts, and ideas to emerge, assigning codes to each. Just as with the faculty data, each code, once assigned, was constantly compared to the uncoded data. Similarly, the codes were physically sorted into themes, adding a branch to the growing mind map. This started to allow a bigger picture to begin to emerge, whereby the connection between the student and faculty experience became apparent. Assigning codes (Phase Two), searching for themes (Phase Three), and reviewing themes (Phase Four) was conducted over the span of four months, allowing for time to deepen my connection with the data. This visual representation of the themes, allowed me to conceptualize the essence of the data, and visualize the many connections and differences between faculty and student understandings and experiences (See Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4

Student data themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Student Experiences in an FYE course	
Acquiring Skills for Success in an FYE course	- Learning skills and strategies - Confidence and mindset
Application and Transference	
Re-envisioning the FYE course Experience	- Timing - Curriculum - Pedagogical approaches

Course curriculum data. After the student and faculty interview data had been transcribed, reviewed, coded, and sorted into themes, I began to review the course curriculum and my research notes to see if any new codes or themes emerged. Although no new themes emerged, the written curriculum, course outlines, and my research notes added depth and breadth to the themes that had already emerged. Based on these preliminary themes, quotes were drawn from the data and sorted under each theme alongside accompanying narratives. Phase five involved defining and naming the themes, ultimately categorizing the phenomena of the FYE course, revealing the themes discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 (Phase Six – Producing the Report).

Although during data analysis, I noticed significant overlap between the faculty and student stories, I decided to keep the two data sets separate in my data presentation; keeping the voices separate is an attempt to honour the sacredness and uniqueness of each standpoint. When the stories were threaded together, I felt the individual standpoint of each voice lost its significance.

Ethical Considerations

Anticipating ethical concerns is important, but even more important is moving past procedural ethics toward ethical practice. Ethical practice requires researchers constantly engage in the process of reflecting on ways of knowing, doing, and being to protect participants from harm, including the potential of unintended harm (T. Scheffel & C. Mady, personal communication, July, 2015). Further, I agree with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2007) notion that "everything's ethics" (p. 24), and I appreciate "no research methodology is ethically privileged" (Shaw, 2003, p. 14). For this reason, ethical considerations were woven throughout my descriptions of recruitment, data collection, and analysis methods. Procedural ethics, such as those explored here, provide a framework for researchers, prompting consideration of the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants, as well as, respect for consent as a continuously negotiated process (Brydon-Miller, 2009; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1992, 1994; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Hilsen, 2006; VanMaanen, 2011; Wiles, 2013).

Qualitative research asks us to continually hold the ethics of our work up for scrutiny, while recognizing the emergent nature of constructivist-like research will result in ethical issues that arise with surprise (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993); these were documented in my research journal and responded to in the moment, as I capitalized on ways of doing that empowered participants, continually negotiated consent, engaging in conversation and mentorship with my research supervisor, striving to remain connected to the experiences of my collaborators as research participants, and questioning the unintended harm inherent in any research design.

As a researcher engaged in emergent and reflexive research, or, as I would argue any research, it is important I assume responsibility for how my actions and research practices affect the lives of my collaborators (Hilsen, 2006). Due to my dual-position as both a researcher and

employee at the institution of study, it was important to ensure participants perceived freedom to decline participation. Arms-length recruitment methods, as described in the methodology above, were employed to ensure participants had the right to decline participation. Through the process of critical self-reflection, as well as continually negotiating consent, I strived to remain connected to the experiences of my collaborators as research participants and fellow researchers, and the unintended harm inherent in any research design.

For me to live my ethics, it was important participants participate in all or part of the research, feeling safe and supported to withdraw completely at any time (Wiles, 2013). For the student participants, who were compensated for their time, it was important they knew the compensation would be received regardless of their continued participation. Member-checking was employed with all interview participants to ensure an accurate portrayal of their lived experiences. Further, gender-neutrality was woven throughout my report of findings to honour my commitment to empowerment, and to embed another layer of anonymity. To my knowledge as a researcher, there was no participant harm throughout the inquiry and participants did not view any power imbalances or perceived judgment; participants shared details they felt comfortable disclosing and no pressure was applied to attain information or change curricular or pedagogical practices. Throughout the process, I worked to meet my faculty participants with a beginner's mind, meeting them in the moment, free of judgment (Puente & Bender, 2015), and in a conversational space that honoured their experiences. I am hopeful this approach helped mediate the power differential inherent in participant-researcher interactions.

Chapter Summary

Using a case study framework, this inquiry examined the intended purpose and current understandings of one First Year Experience course within a medium-sized Ontario College.

Qualitative methodology is grounded by the researcher's ontological and theoretical worldview, explaining how ethnographic-like methods allowed participants to share their emic perspectives. Participant recruitment, data collection and analysis methods were detailed, culminating with a discussion of the ethical considerations. Participants' stories are shared in Chapter 4, painting a rich picture of how the FYE course has been experienced and understood by the participants of this inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FYE COURSE EXPERIENCE

> *If we hope to go anywhere or develop ourselves in any way, we can only step from where we are standing. If we don't really know where we are standing… we may only go in circles…*
>
> ~Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, p. 15)

Introductory Remarks

In this chapter, I present the findings, in the form of themes emerging from the qualitative interviews outlined in Chapter Three. I begin this chapter with an overview of the faculty and student participants in order to fully contextualize the interview and conversation data. Next, I present the findings as they relate to my research question, in order to paint a picture of how one first-year experience course is understood and experienced by various stakeholders. The research findings are organized in two distinct sections: a) faculty understanding and experiences; and b) student understanding and experiences. It is important to note the FYE course curriculum and course outline are referred to throughout the data as they relate, substantiate, or inform participants' understandings and experiences.

Emerging Faculty Themes

Within the faculty experience, three overarching themes emerged: 1) role and purpose of the FYE course; 2) pedagogical and instructional approaches; and 3) challenges and opportunities. Participants' interview data are embedded in the discussion of themes to paint a rich picture of the participants' experiences and understandings of the FYE course phenomenon.

Role and Purpose of the FYE Course

The role and purpose of the FYE course varied, but faculty shared some common understandings related to teaching students how to learn and scaffolding academic success, and supporting the student transition within and through the FYE course.

Teaching students how to learn and scaffolding academic success. Faculty participants overwhelmingly identified the first-year experience course as an essential piece of the student success puzzle, most notably for its role in supporting students' academic success, specifically through scaffolding their development of academic skills. The academic skills required to be successful in post-secondary were referred to by Ryan as the "foundation upon which a successful academic career can be built." Ryan described academic skills as the currency through which students can access academic success, and as a result, their dreams:

> We're going to build a foundation here and from that foundation you can go as far as you want to go… And all of it unfortunately is based on academic performance… But, your academic performance will determine if you get into the program you want, which will then determine if you graduate and you get the job and you start to go down that path. All of it's based on your academic performance, which means if they can develop these skills and habits there is no reason they can't do it.

Similarly, faculty articulated FYE courses have a unique opportunity to level the playing field by teaching students the learning and study skills they believe are required for academic success in higher education, all within the context of a credit-bearing course. Faculty recognized the differing levels of ability and preparedness of the twenty-first century learner, as well as the preparatory nature of the certificate program. They emphasized their belief learning and study skill instruction equips many students with the technical skills required for learning even in the

presence of learning disabilities, time away from education, the transition from secondary school, or English language learning.

For the faculty in this inquiry, the core curriculum of the FYE course encompasses a range of academic skills, often referred to by participants as “techniques,” “models,” “frameworks,” and “strategies” including skills such as time management, managing and dealing with procrastination, stress management, test taking skills, memory and retention strategies, and how to read a textbook. A summary of FYE course outlines (See Appendix Three) revealed other academic skills such as setting short-term and long-term goals and application of undefined "study skills and success strategies” as well as unspecified “theories and practice skills related to motivation and learning.”

Faculty suggested time management was an important academic skill for students to develop in the context of the FYE course. Revealing the depth and breadth of the time management umbrella, faculty explained time management strategies included components such as task management, managing procrastination, to-do-lists, chunking, breaking down, and organizing tasks. Faculty equated time management skills with academic potential, with some suggesting time management skills, in their opinion and/or experience, had the greatest impact on students, offering opportunities to discuss productivity, time allocation, managing expectations, and staying motivated. Ryan explained in the FYE course, faculty help students to understand the importance of building their ability to effectively manage their unstructured time:

> Especially the bridge from some of them coming from a scheduled environment whether it be work or high-school, where it was 9-5 regular hours to a point where you have to come 17 hours and then the other 140 are up in the air, like it’s up to you to figure that

> out… what are the most effective students doing during those times that they don't physically have to sit in the class.

Ryan noted their attempt to inspire students to engage less with their social online presence in exchange for more time spent studying, recognizing students in this era have many things competing for their time, some more than others. Some faculty were aware they were supporting students in becoming "mindful" of where their time was going.

Jessie stated under the umbrella of time management, they talked about to-do-lists, how to organize tasks, task management, and procrastination. In addition, they indicated goal setting was a distinct part of their time management curriculum, inspiring students to conceptualize their priorities and evaluate time wasters. Attention was drawn to the fact faculty often introduce different tools based on their own personal experience, making direct reference to the varying methods used to organize and manage time: they indicated they often preferred to introduce students to strategies they have used in the past, shedding light on how faculty's lived experiences as post-secondary students may influence their pedagogical practices in FYE courses. Kris and Ryan noted a lack of time management skills become especially problematic for students given the structure of college classes, most of which run once a week for 14 weeks. Ryan also remarked instruction and skill development in this time management has the potential to augment success by offering students insight into what to expect:

> The other challenge is the ebb and flow of our system right, where you come in, in the first two weeks you're like college is easy, hardly anything. And then, the third week when you get slammed with all of these assignments, then it's overwhelming and then you get through and it's fine, and then it's overwhelming again.

Faculty participants differentiated between the practicality of teaching academic skills and the theoretical concepts taught in students' other classes, identifying the uniqueness of the FYE course; they firmly believed academic skills and strategies taught in the FYE have the potential to become part of the learners' toolboxes because they are learned as skill rather than knowledge; this distinguishes the content of academic skills from the more rote fact-based knowledge comprising the learners' other core courses.

Supporting the student transition. The preparatory program where the FYE course rests is a one-year certificate program, described by one participant as "a bridge between high school and post-secondary," noting it attracts students with a range of different learning needs and transitional issues, including students who were not accepted to their program of choice, those who require upgrading, and mature students who recognize the need for support as they adjust to the demands and rigors of post-secondary education. For the faculty in this inquiry, supporting students' transition into and through their program of study emerged as an important function of the FYE course.

Supporting students as they transition into post-secondary. Faculty shared the FYE course has the opportunity to provide transitional support for students who may otherwise slip through the cracks, including students with learning disabilities, and most notably international students and mature students. Although the course does not intentionally and explicitly accommodate for these needs, many faculty take the time to connect with these students and offer additional support in their transition. Jessie recounted, while they were teaching the FYE course, they thought they "missed the boat" when planning for the unique needs of international students, revealing the complexities of student needs in the FYE course and faculty willingness to meet the diverse needs of students.

In addition to academic skills, faculty listed other skills directly related to the transition into post-secondary, referred to by one participant as "orientating students to the college." Charlie described this as making students aware of the help and support available on campus, and addressing more basic needs, such as increasing student awareness of supports such as food, finances, or shelter. Other participants echoed these more fundamental or basic needs and extended the conversation to include things such as mediating the overuse of technology, checking in on students' ability to take care of self (e.g., laundry), and supporting students' health and well-being by discussing food and nutrition choices.

Supporting students as they transition through post-secondary. In the one-year certificate program in which the FYE course resides, students are upgrading or preparing for entry into diploma or degree programs. Faculty distinguished supporting students' transition included providing opportunities for career exploration and the development of career clarity, guiding students through the certificate program in a way that allowed them to evolve their self-awareness and make more informed decisions about their futures. Charlie noted the students' development of academic skills was interwoven into the development of career clarity:

> …looking at their values and their interests, and really having that exploratory year to think about where they were going was one of the outcomes that I saw a lot of students go through, and whether or not they knew it in the beginning or the end, I thought a lot of students transitioned through questioning what their original goals were; or maybe their parents told them to go to school so they had no goals, but through the course and the activities within it, that they started to understand and learn more about themselves the way they learn, who they were, what their values were. And, you know, really actually

> looked at what it is, so if they wanted to be a nurse, they had the opportunity to explore what does that mean? Besides, what you've seen on media.

Charlie explained through this process of career exploration, some students learn a career in that field is not what they want, but could proceed accordingly with this new-found clarity and the newly acquired academic skills. Informed by their own "life altering" experiences teaching in the north, Jessie not only encouraged career exploration, but shared they urged their students to consider the geographical context of their work, broadening their horizons to consider work outside of their home city.

In addition to career clarity, faculty shared creating space for the development of meaningful teacher-student and student-student relationships was important in supporting students' movement through the program. Faculty noted many students struggled with the social aspect of college, having witnessed this specifically with mature learners and English language learners. Sam and Charlie shared they purposefully put students into groups and planned for group learning to help students form social bonds with their peers. Faculty believed supporting students' social integration in the context of the FYE course not only supports students making friendships and flourishing in higher education, but also built their ability to work in groups, which is an academic skill in its own right. For many, increased self-confidence was a definite goal:

> At the end, I always hoped that students walked away with a sense of increased self-confidence, a strong sense that they are applying for the right program for them after [the certificate program], the skills to work through challenges that accompany post-secondary education, and the strategies to be successful as a lifelong learner.

Pedagogical and Instructional Approaches

Faculty understood the overall purpose of the FYE course was to scaffold the development of academic skills, and to support student's transition into post-secondary. Inevitably, these understandings influenced their pedagogical and instruction approaches which shifted their role to coach or mentor and supported them in their quest to make learning relevant and transferable.

Role of faculty as coach or mentor. Faculty generally shared the perspective inspiring motivation and acting in the role or capacity of a coach or mentor was especially important in the FYE course. One participant compared their role to a counsellor, sharing many students in the program had overcome big life obstacles, sharing their trials and tribulations with faculty. They acknowledged making an effort to connect these students with counselling services was important, but that the content of the course, and the personal things they shared to make learning matter, resulted in a flow of conversation that made it difficult to interrupt or interject with the provision of outside resources.

Others saw value in inspiring students, recognizing an inspirational leader can help students navigate the challenges inherent in the transition into post-secondary. For example, Ryan felt an important part of their role was to inspire students to persist amidst challenge, and to normalize student experiences when they moved past the honeymoon phase of college:

> And then you start questioning… maybe I don't have the ability to be here I made a mistake. And you don't realize. I mean we talk about that a lot of times. It should be overwhelming … And it should be stressful. Because you're growing as a human being and it requires that... If you live your whole life living in a comfort zone where you could never push yourself, what fun is that?

Ryan further explained as a motivator and coach, they aimed to inspire students to see the worth and value in investing time and energy, and in committing to the task of self-development through discipline. Ryan noted their approach was based on experiences with inspirational teachers, where the content is less important than how the teacher made them feel. Ryan shared the importance of giving this back to their students and noted that this would likely be their approach of choice in any course, not just the FYE course. Describing specifically the FYE course, they stated making students aware of the potential they have to overcome obstacles is important:

> This is what I always say to them. There was someone who was in the exact same position as you, same education, social socioeconomic background. They might be a single mom, whatever your situation is, and they have been successful at what you want to achieve. So, if someone in the exact same situation has achieved what you aim to achieve, why can't you? Right? And that's what I try to instill in them. And I say I can teach you the strategies, and skills, and habits to get there, but it's up to you to follow them… It's not easy. But if you do it, you're disciplined, you can achieve what you want to achieve. I think it's a straight line. Achievement in my mind is a straight line. Fulfillment is a totally different category, but achievement and success, there is a recipe, and if you follow it, you're going to end up getting there.

Making learning relevant. While faculty shared the significance of mentoring and supporting students' growth in an FYE course, they also emphasized the need to make learning relevant. Participants acknowledged this means creating a classroom environment where the real needs of students are addressed in a timely and relevant way. Faculty shared their belief the FYE course curriculum and learning experiences should be responsive or emergent. They explained in

their experience and opinion, the teacher has a duty to respond to student needs, changing their plans when necessary to accommodate the developmental needs emerging through deep listening to students' verbal and non-verbal cues. Charlie shared a reflection in action, resulting in changing their plans to meet the in-the-moment needs of students:

> For instance, I had whole lesson planned one week. I came into the class. I couldn't call the students anything but squirrelly. I knew something was going on. I was ten minutes into the lesson, when I just stopped and said, "Okay, what's going on in here? Everybody seems stressed out and distracted, talk to me." Students were concerned about an online biology quiz that they had to do, so I just changed directions and helped them prep for that in the moment…

In an effort to be responsive, faculty shared their one-on-one interactions with students often guided the content of the following week's class, and by getting to know the real needs of their class, they were able to provide content that thoughtfully responded to the diverse needs of students. One participant shared that this responsive curriculum honoured students by the very nature of meeting their needs where they are, rather than creating "additional stress, additional anxiety, additional work." Although the most commonly shared experience was a desire to make learning relevant by responding in the moment and proactively to students' real needs, another pedagogical strategy emerged, one that participants explained deepened their ability to respond to the needs of learners by making learning not only relevant, but transferable.

Making learning transferable. Faculty noted an overarching goal of the FYE course was to teach study skills with the purpose of supporting student learning in other courses. Faculty believed in enhancing students' ability to transfer learning and academic skills to concurrent and future learning experiences. Participants explained how they aimed to make learning

transferable, revealing a myriad of ways this happened. Charlie and Sam explained how they used their experience and background in learning skills instruction. They shared during the FYE course they aimed to make learning transferable by connecting study skills and academic skill content to the students' more challenging courses, most notably biology and chemistry. Rather than leaving a study strategy hypothetical, they aimed to present the skill in a way students applied and practised it within the context of a more challenging course. In their opinion, this intentional focus on transferability enabled students to see the value of a strategy, increasing their buy-in and engagement. For Kris, Charlie, and Sam, it was important the strategies taught in the FYE course were applied to students' more challenging courses in order to develop confidence and mastery, increasing the likelihood these skills became part of their learning toolbox, accessible in future programmes of study:

> If you learn time management, organization study skills, and within the first-year experience course, you teach students how to actually apply them. So, you're not just teaching them the theory, but you're actually scaffolding the learning and ensuring that they have time to practise the skill enough times throughout the semester that it becomes a habit.

Similarly, Ryan stated this course was not about "regurgitating content," but rather "demonstrating skills." Kris expressed a disinterest in testing about the strategies, measuring student's success instead by their ability to apply the strategies. In fact, this was shared as a benchmark, whereby other faculty measured their success. Indicators of student learning included when students returned and explained how they were applying the strategies, whether it be a mind map, reading strategy, time management tool, or when students who had not experienced the FYE course, reached out to learn the strategies they saw their peers using.

Sam shared when teaching the strategies in the context of their other more challenging courses, deep connections could be facilitated to increase students' ability to learn and then transfer the strategy:

> …if they were learning something specific like cellular division, learning about mitosis or meiosis, and they were actually learning all the different stages, then we could actually apply a learning strategy for how they could actually use memory tips to remember those stages in the actual week they were learning that material. Then have the memory strategies when they were studying before having the exam or test.

Sam believed this not only made the strategy more relevant to students, but also increased their engagement because they were learning material they knew they needed to know. Sam observed sometimes students were so focused on improving the GPA of their core courses to get into their program of choice, that they "didn't see the value in it if they weren't actually learning material in combination with the strategy."

Sam shared many examples of how the FYE content could be paired with content from the students' core courses, such as biology, noting these activities visibly affected student engagement:

> One way I did it? I had them come up with their own exam questions and sit in groups, and they would actually rotate around the room so that the first group actually made up exam questions and then they would try and answer them and then they would move on to the next table where they hadn't seen the questions and then they would get together and practice those questions. So, it was a relevant way of making a mock test that I was going for, and in the end, we had all of these potential questions for biology that they could actually, they might see, on their exam. And they learned how to do that, create a

> mock test, and then we sat down and actually practiced the mock test, then I think they probably learned that skill and they might be able to take that forward to not actually doing that in groups but on their own or with friends, or whatever for the future class… because it was at the end, they actually used memory strategies such as acronyms and acrostics to help them with the answers because I also made them answer the questions.

Sam said students were not only engaged, but also shared they reported it was helpful, what they needed, and in the students' opinion, learning happened. Sam identified this activity required students to apply reading, notetaking, and study strategies, while studying material for one of their most challenging courses. Sam also used the opportunity to make connections to time and task management, concluding the activity by discussing how students could take the time required to study, review, and practice what was shared, prior to their upcoming exam.

Similarly, another participant described this as "making learning tangible," describing how they aimed to achieve this by connecting the strategies and skills to a larger goal–students' future academic and career goals:

> This is the challenge, right? You always want to make learning tangible. You always want to connect it to the real world. And you have to connect these habits and skills to the bigger picture. Teaching students how to read a textbook is not inspiring. It's not like the most engaging lecture. But, if I can say your ultimate goal is to be a nurse, when you go into that program the amount you're going to have to read is going to double, the better reader you are the faster you're going to get to your goal, the more likely you are going to achieve your goal. So, if you can read a little bit every day and you can go from being a passive to an active reader and these are the ways you become an active reader, when you get there next year, you're going to have 52 weeks of working on reading, and you're

> going to be so much further ahead and then you're going to be able to achieve your goal of being a nurse and buying the house you want and doing the things you truly dream of.

Further, Ryan shared in their opinion, there is no reason why students are not able to transfer the skills and habits they have learned after participation in an FYE course. Ryan highlighted any successful academic needs to develop this skill set, but for some, it is not through participation in an FYE course, but rather through "trial and error:"

> And, you know, we both have gone through university, and during that time, I can't say I flipped through a book that told me how to study or how to read textbook or everything, but once you've done it a hundred times you begin to develop your own habits.

Ryan states some students develop these skills through necessity as they venture on their academic journey. Although some students come back and report they are using the strategies, others might have the knowledge, but lack the commitment, "making it a little bit harder on themselves then it needs to be." Ryan pointed out committing, implementing, and following through are challenges for many students. Ryan observed how students who do commit, implement, and follow through, put a plan in motion for future behaviour, noting this consistency is key to performing well. Ryan recalled a student who had transferred the time management strategies learned in class by organizing themselves with a schedule and committing to what they referred to as the 1:1 ratio (one hour of studying for every hour of class), allocating time in their schedule to visit the on-campus tutoring centre.

Faculty shared the pedagogical challenge of teaching students the strategies and skills contained within an FYE course, alongside the content from their more challenging core courses. They noted although they did not feel they needed to be an expert in those challenging high attrition courses, such as physics or chemistry, they did feel the need to be flexible for the varied

courses and content students were experiencing outside of their FYE course. They shared students were often in different sections, experiencing different course delivery; some were out of sync; some had completely different courses. Sam highlighted even amidst these challenges, there was also an opportunity:

> So, you always had to think of how you could incorporate what they were doing… What's plan b and c for some of those students who weren't following the traditional path. But I kind of liked for them to see it in different subjects because I think in order to test whether or not they actually understood the strategy if you could get them to try it with a different subject or a different textbook, but use the same strategy you could really tell if they could transfer that to, and that would be an indicator of whether or not, next year, when they go into the next program and they didn't have the FYE course, whether they'd be able to take those skills and transfer them to the next program.

In addition to accommodating the varied courses students were taking, faculty noted timing was key. One participant noted the academic strategies taught in the FYE course are better received when they are strategically or coincidentally timed with work flow in their other courses, and when the strategies can be presented at this timely juncture, students see them as time-saving, rather than as creating extra work. Ryan gave the example of modelling a reading strategy when you know students have five chapters of biology reading to complete for next week, noting the strategy becomes "very effective" because it is "very timely," and students saw its value in reducing workload, rather than creating extra work. They explained this has become more challenging since the combination of the FYE course with another course, leaving seven weeks to cover the FYE content. Ryan acknowledged the content of the other course could be used to model the strategies, but they were cautious to proceed in this way out of fear of increasing the

volume of work, “I don’t want it to be a course that is going to create additional stress, anxiety, and work… let’s figure out what you need to study, achieve, and learn and use these skills to help you achieve those things.”

One participant felt teaching strategies they found personally beneficial increased student transference, because these skills and strategies were evidence-based from both the literature and personal experience. Jessie highlighted some of the strategies presented in the course textbook have been disproven by current studies, noting presenting real and authentic examples increased validity and thus, students’ ability to apply and transfer the knowledge. Jessie noted students’ ability to transfer or apply the learning was based on what students chose to carry with them, and their application of these skills was not necessarily immediate. Rather, they astutely observed the likelihood of students applying the strategies might be influenced by future events when they are prompted to use and apply the strategy:

> I don’t have any argument with the fact they may not immediately adopt some strategies. But, if they come across something when they’re researching and they say, “Oh I remember I did that in the success course,” then maybe they’ll think, “Oh yeah, I think I’ll use that again.”

Challenges and Opportunities

Faculty noted many challenges that impact the enactment of the FYE course, and ultimately, the student experience. They also shared an abundance of opportunities, whereby the student experience could be improved. The challenges and opportunities that emerged include perceived value, curriculum, faculty capacity, support, time and physical space, and class size.

Perceived value. Faculty participants touched on the importance of the perceived value of the FYE course by the administration and institution, and by students. Faculty noted the recent

blending of the learning outcomes from two preparatory courses (a health care in Canada course and the outcomes from the first-year experience course) have resulted in strains on the capacity of faculty teaching the FYE course. Participants noted the unique skills required by FYE faculty, mainly teaching academic skills and supporting students' transition into and through the first year, stating faculty with this expertise are less likely to also be an expert in the health care in Canada content, or in any other content that might be paired with an FYE course for that matter. One participant noted faculty are likely to "lean toward what they know best:"

> You may find them, and I'm sure there are people who have both those skills, but you're also, I think, going to find that they are two different areas of expertise, and then you're going to get unequal information in the courses, and of course faculty are always going to lean toward what they know best. So, if I was teaching that course, it would obviously more like it used to be which is that full inclusive success in pre-health and I would be doing probably the minimum in the Health Care in Canada portion to learn it and teach it and meet the objectives for the students, but it certainly wouldn't be a portion I would be passionate about.

Similarly, Charlie shared they are no longer an expert in the whole course, but rather, an expert in teaching students how to learn, and a novice teaching the health science content that is now a part of the FYE course.

Faculty pointed out you will have some talented faculty who can teach both, but blending FYE and content courses is like saying "you can teach biology and (pause), and electrical engineering in the same course." Similarly, Sam reiterated the uniqueness of the FYE content, acknowledging, although they had a science background, the skill set of teaching students how to learn, and supporting their holistic development became the primary focus. In addition, they

highlighted faculty's ability to provide holistic support is influenced not only by their experience with student development and learning skills, but also by their own integration into the wider college, whereby,

> …we hire a lot of part-timers, who come in and come out, and our systems within the college change very often, sometimes the faculty aren't even relaying the correct information to students, so for somebody to understand what all is available [at the institution and] in the greater community and be able to give that students in a timely and relevant way, when they need it, to repeat it, there is so much to this course that I think, maybe isn't really thought of when they're looking to fill a section.

In addition to this structural challenge, faculty generally felt as though the institution did not value the FYE course experience. Charlie shared this was reflected in how faculty were assigned to teach the course:

> From my experience, it's not seen by the institution and the people making the decisions as an actual valuable course. Which is kind of strange to say because it was people in those people in those positions that introduced the course, but when it came to loading for faculty it was almost an afterthought that the sciences were, you know the main stakes … so what I found is that often faculty who had no experience or expertise in teaching people how to learn would end up with these courses and were doing completely different things.

Sam reinforced this view by stating, in their opinion, "I don't think that everybody fully appreciates and understands the value of learning how to learn," noting an unintended consequence is faculty often lack the study skills knowledge, and by consequence, end up doing completely different things, resulting in curricular inconsistency among courses. Charlie and

Kris expanded on this to share a larger issue, the undervaluing of students' non-cognitive skills and the student transition by the institution; both shared their feelings that administration views the FYE course as one "anyone can teach".

Faculty participants also noted the perceived value students assign to the course, noting some students see it as a "bird course." For example, Charlie made reference to the larger systemic way in which the course is devalued, stating there is the perception the FYE marks are not evaluated for entry into their desired future program. Charlie states if this is the case, then the institution is telling students it is not "valuable", and if this is not the case, then clearer messaging is required. It was suggested that this perception is shaped throughout their first semester, and not necessarily something students arrive thinking. Rather, it was suggested when their other more challenging content rich courses become busy, their engagement in the FYE course starts to drop. Sam mentioned the key to preventing this mindset, in their experience, has been to link the FYE content (academic skills) to the core course content. Sam compares their first-year teaching experience (where they share, they were "trying to survive"), to their most recent experience, and notes through making these curricular connections, engagement increased.

Curriculum. Learning objectives and outcomes are defined by the institution (see Appendix Three); however, faculty have individual autonomy over how this material is delivered in their classrooms, referred to by participants as "curriculum." Three of the participants made mention of a curriculum that had been developed for this course, explaining a detailed package of lessons, activities, assignments, and PowerPoints had been developed by an expert team. Two other participants made reference to learning about this curriculum after the fact, or to having heard about it, but never having seen it. Participants' perceptions of this curriculum differed.

Kris was unaware resources to support instruction existed. Jessie highlighted curriculum was dropped and were unsure as to why it was not redeveloped. Another, who had used this curriculum, struggled to see value in some of the assignments. For example, they said the large paper seemed to fit a communications course more than a first-year experience course. Sam shared it was helpful the first time they taught it, but this curriculum was reflective of a "stand-alone course," and after having taught the course once, Sam started to modify it in a way that linked the strategies and skills to the students' more challenging courses, as shared earlier. Jessie predicted the adoption of a textbook replaced the curriculum, sharing the textbook now guided their curriculum development. Jessie stated the textbook company has access to resources beyond that of the typical academic institution, resulting in a "huge database of information" from which a textbook and the resulting course can be based.

Sam shared an untapped curricular resource, the content of student's other courses, had the potential to transform how the FYE course was taught and delivered. Sam shared their own personal background in science influenced how they were able to "see where I could fit the links in," making it easier to make connections between the strategies and other content. However, an untapped opportunity was noted here, whereby if FYE faculty had access to the content of students' core courses (textbooks and learning management systems), these connections and links would be much easier to make. Sam shared their ability to contextualize the learning and draw connections between the study skills and science content was strengthened by the relationship cultivated between the core course faculty. Sam shared an example of how one particular faculty agreed to keep the FYE course instructor abreast of what topics were being covered each week. In addition, they provided the course outline, syllabi, and textbook for the FYE course instructor to use. Sam noted this allowed for connections to be anticipated rather

than uncovered through detective work in class. Participants shared other ways in which the already developed curriculum could be improved to address issues such as math anxiety and strategies for learning math.

Curricular autonomy was mentioned as both a challenge and an opportunity. It was noted by participants and observed through their stories that variability exists in how the FYE course is enacted. One participant shared that there have been attempts to streamline approaches through start-up meetings, shared virtual spaces for assignment and activity sharing, and wrap up meetings. One participant noted a lead teacher sent emails and made contact to share some exemplar activities, but support did not extend past this.

Capacity of faculty. While participants recognized the important role faculty play in inspiring motivation in the FYE course, they also emphasized the need for FYE course faculty to have certain skills and experience, noting pedagogical approaches are influenced by these skills and experiences. For example, Sam shared the ability of faculty to take a "whole approach" is positively influenced by opportunities to work one-on-one with students, where a richer understanding of their lived experience can be developed. Sam notes faculty who have experience providing one-on-one learning and counselling support, have a unique vantage point of what students need, an understanding of the student lifecycle (allowing them to predict the timeliness of student pain points), and an in-depth understanding of the resources available to students:

> If you're just a faculty in the classroom, do you really know all the ins and outs of what's going on in the students' lives? Because what happens in the classroom is just such a small part - if we think of Maslow's hierarchy of needs- if they're homeless and can't

> afford to eat- it's not that they're disengaged in the classroom it's that they haven't met their basic needs to be able to meet those higher level needs of learning.

Sam noted this is more than an issue of faculty ability and indicated administrative decisions made when assigning faculty to this course perpetuate the problem. As they state, it is an issue perpetuated by the system's reliance on part-timers who "come in and come out," combined with a system that rapidly changes services and supports, resulting in faculty teaching an FYE course who do not know the supports and services available, make incorrect college and community referrals, and/or are unable to provide the correct support in a timely and relevant way. Sam stated, "There is so much to this course that I think, maybe, isn't really thought of when they're looking to fill a section." Participants also stated when FYE courses are viewed as fillers for faculty workload assignments, or when FYE faculty do not have the passion or desire to support students' holistic development, institutions "fail an FYE course." Charlie explained the effect of an unengaged faculty on student learning when an FYE course,

> …may be handed out as a filler to faculty who are not interested in student development theory or learning theories, but the administrators view it as a course that anyone can teach and give it to someone who is not passionate about it. I have heard faculty say they don't like teaching it. How can a faculty member be effective if they themselves have no interest? Some of my favourite courses were not my favourite subjects, but it was the excitement of the professor that made them great.

Charlie further reflected on this sentiment, stating rather than assigning this course to faculty as often an "afterthought,"

> … it would be interesting if an institution looked at it as the first and foremost, and sort of reversed that, because if you can teach students how to study and how to learn, they

> can learn anything, and if you empower them to understand and know how they learn, then they have the power to take ownership of their learning and learn whatever they want beyond what they think, or what they've been told in their past of what they can and can't do, so to challenge some of those assumptions and to put it first and foremost. I mean I would like to work for an institution that did that.

Support. Faculty shared the importance of feeling supported. Both learning communities and professional development were described as forms of help that supported or enhanced teaching. One participant shared in the past there was a faculty professional learning community (FLC) providing space for FYE instructors to explore the challenges they experienced, while cultivating a partnership between core content course instructors (biology and chemistry) and the FYE course instructors. It was suggested this opportunity provided a reciprocal exchange of learning and support, whereby the challenging core course content could be discussed and unpacked, allowing the FYE faculty to use this knowledge to inform their instruction, providing a more unified approach to teaching. Sam described this relationship as key to their success as a student affairs professional teaching for the first-time, where they could share wisdom as a learning skills specialist, and in turn received support with more administrative things, such as navigating the learning management system from other seasoned college faculty. Sam described how this individual became a "go-to-person," providing immediate answers. Sam recommends this FLC be reassembled, noting it is "crucial" to making learning relevant, whereby FYE faculty can use the content of their challenging courses to model and enact the learning strategies presented in the FYE course. Kris echoed this sentiment, expressing their hopes for the opportunity to connect with other FYE faculty, sharing how isolating it can be, especially when teaching on a smaller satellite or remote campus. They further shared they fall back on

regurgitating content, because it is less time-consuming than designing active learning, a task that could be accomplished together or shared in a learning community: knowing hypothetically about the teaching learning strategies is not enough if they cannot embed core content or re-envision their approach. Kris shared supportive resources would likely include curriculum (described as lesson plans and activities), and synchronous support, ideally, in the form of an on-going teaching and learning community. Administrative support was clearly identified by faculty as underlying the enactment of teaching and learning communities and professional development.

Time. Issues of time were mentioned by faculty, either in terms of the amount of instructional time available or the timing when skills would be taught. In line with the issue of time, participants echoed the challenges inherent in the more recent changes to the FYE course, whereby the content of the course has been combined with the learning outcomes of another course, reducing the amount of time spent on the FYE course experience by half for most faculty. In relation to the study skills content, Jessie stated,

> Yes, so the time I went through the first alteration of the course I realized there is not a hope I could ever introduce all this material. So, I introduce minimal amounts of it to get the topic covered so it ties in with the course text and the text chapter topics about it, but it's very brief.

Similarly, faculty shared examples of content they used to cover, that they no longer have time for, such as values and learning about learning and thinking. Kris, among other faculty, shared in their opinion, learning how to learn was the most important content.

The challenge of timing in terms of when academic skills and strategies should be introduced to align with student needs was also shared. Faculty noted students would sometimes

feel they would have liked the strategy to be introduced earlier, or the order of when things were learned did not align to when the skills were needed in their other more challenging courses. Jessie stated this was particularly evident with mature students, who found the strategies and tools very helpful early on in the semester.

It was noted the depth and breadth of the transitional issues affecting students requires more contact time. Similarly, another participant shared a three-hour course, once a week, does not provide enough contact time with students as they navigate their transition into post-secondary studies. Another participant shared time constraints prevented them from bringing in important content such as "Aboriginal and Indigenous people," whereby two others mentioned a lack of available time to properly support international students and English language learners.

Physical space and class size. Physical space and class size emerged as important to the FYE course experience. Physical space was linked to faculty ability to provide students with a learning experience, whereby social integration was supported, and social relationships were cultivated. One participant shared certain room configurations made impromptu group work challenging, where flexible spaces or large tables with eight students created conditions where students were facing each other rather than "looking at someone's back and not engaging with the person sitting next to you." In terms of class sizes, one participant emphasized the challenge of getting to know students in cohorts of 50 students. They also pointed out the challenge of being responsive when class sizes exceed 30 students, noting the importance of being able to "switch directions" in an FYE class to respond to students needs in the moment. Charlie stated, "Being flexible and working with students in the moment on their current needs is where the buy in from students and real value is. They won't forget that you helped them navigate a problem in the moment." Building on this, Jessie shared a model they had experienced in a different school

setting, whereby faculty met-up with smaller groups of students in morning assemblies as an example of how relationships can be cultivated in smaller groups and complimented by more frequent connections.

Emerging Student Themes

Within the student experience, four overarching themes emerged: 1) student experiences in a FYE course; 2) acquiring the skills for success; 3) application and transference; and 4) re-envisioning the FYE course experience. Participants' interview data are embedded in the discussion of themes to paint a rich picture of the participants' experiences and understandings of the FYE course phenomenon.

Student Experiences in a FYE Course

When invited to describe how their experience in an FYE course supported their success students shared a range of experiences. Students revealed a range of needs exist, and although no two needs were the exactly the same, similarities and differences were apparent throughout. The following findings outline each student's individual view of success and their overall impression of the FYE course experience.

For Sandy, the FYE course aligned with their short-term goal of gaining entry into a degree level nursing program, but there was some confusion as to whether the FYE course was included in the weighted average for acceptance into future programs. Sandy shared their own personal interest was to learn skills for leadership, and to learn about the brain and neuroscience, something they stated was a small component of their first-year experience course, but related to their ability to achieve success. Sandy, uniquely identifying their needs as a mature student and parent, shared having a "knowledgeable teacher who was well educated and has been to school

and experienced these things and able to bring those experiences in that particular course was probably the most beneficial aspect of [the course]."

Jordan discussed the FYE course was low on their priorities for courses, largely due to the perception chemistry, biology, and math required more of their time and energy. They shared how particular skills were taught, such as cover letters and portfolios, were presented in a way that was "condescending." Although Jordan procrastinated reading, they identified as a self-motivated, visual learner, and "perfectionist." Success was viewed as "knowing the content and doing well," but also equated to having a good relationship with professors. As will be expanded on later in the findings, Jordan shared in this particular course, they felt there was a disconnect between the students and professor, something they suggested impacted their experience.

Tyler described the FYE course was a place where their confidence improved, social relationships were formed, and perception of college shifted from negative to positive. Tyler described as an international student, and an English Language Learner, the support of their FYE course experience and faculty helped them to deal with stress and depression, in addition to language barriers. Tyler stated getting to know peers in their FYE course is what shifted their perception of college. At the time of the interview, Tyler described failing two courses in their health science degree, but did not internalize this as a personal failure, instead measuring their success by other gains such as social friendships, confidence, and their involvement in the campus and local community. Tyler stated due to failing two courses, they would be moving from the degree program into a diploma level program and would bridge back into the degree after gaining some work experience in the field. Tyler stated they once viewed success as academic, but their perception shifted to include growing socially. After describing the ways in which they had become involved on campus and in the community, Tyler stated "…I tell people

all the time, this was not me, I have changed a lot because of all those kinds of things." To Tyler, success required a shift in mindset, "You have to believe yourself that one day you are going to be success."

Ellis shared the FYE course helped them transition into the Canadian post-secondary system, sharing the notable differences existing between the system in China, where they "learned to study like a machine," in a competitive environment, and the Canadian system where learning is more social and "your value is you as an individual person." Ellis described success as maintaining your academic standing, communicating well with peers, and being confident. Ellis depicted the importance of health, defining it as both a physical and mental state.

Everest described the FYE course as "hands-down" their favourite class setting up their career "in a bigger and broader way." They acknowledged a lot of people said the opposite, and unlike them, others arrived knowing what the course was all about: namely "motivation" and "connection." Everest discussed how learning was a mindset, whereby they gained insight about the sacrifice required for long-term success and this put "life into perspective." They passionately shared the experience of returning to school as a mature student, and how based on their lived experience through mental exhaustion, they learned to prioritize wellness (yoga and meditation). At the time of the interview, Everest had decided to pursue a program and career path unrelated to healthcare and had a desire to take part in a travel or study-abroad opportunity. Everest shared through the FYE experience, they grew into an extroverted individual who used networking to explore new opportunities. Finally, they described success as requiring short term sacrifice, and academically, as possessing the ability to "self-teach."

Acquiring the Skills for Success in an FYE Course

Participants shared the strategies and skills they learned and acquired in their FYE course. For many of the participants, this narrative was woven together with their suggestions for curricular and instructional improvements, which will be detailed later in the results. Participants shared their success was best supported through the acquisition of learning skills and strategies, the development of confidence, and the adoption of specific mindsets that support success.

Learning skills and strategies. Students shared a common desire to have support navigating the post-secondary environment. This was described as the need to be connected to resources, both on campus and in the larger community, to have help knowing where to find supports, and where to get "information." Students also described the need to feel supported navigating the academic demands of post-secondary, most notably through the acquisition of learning strategies and skills. Students shared the FYE course provided opportunities for them to develop their skills in the areas of time management, goal setting, groupwork, oral presentations, studying, research, and reading comprehension, citing their significance, particularly in relation to academic success.

Time management played an important part of each student's success. For many, time management included prioritizing tasks and/or breaking down tasks and managing procrastination. Jordan shared learning how to manage due dates was important, stating having a visual of the month at a glance helped with prioritizing approaching due dates. Similarly, Ellis shared learning how to schedule time using the "daily plan" and "semester plan" was beneficial, especially when it came time to balancing school and various part-time jobs. Tyler made reference to learning time management skills, both within the FYE course and with the help of a student affairs staff member. Tyler also made reference to the importance of time management in

their current program and future profession, noting the need to be able to manage and prioritize multiple demands, a connection they were not able to make while in the FYE course. Ellis shared the "most important" thing learned was the importance of spending double or triple the time spent in class outside of class on tasks, especially for English language learners.

Students were more varied in their discussion of other skill development areas. For example, Sandy felt as though goal setting was a big part of their FYE experience, whereby Ellis highlighted having learned the importance of preparing for class, and of delving back into the content and reviewing after class. Building on this, through participation in the FYE course, Ellis learned success was not achieved from attending class and memorizing content, but rather from further reading on the concepts taught in class to arrive at a deep enough understanding to be able to "make a similar example like an analogy." Ellis also noted this taught them how to prepare for online tests, sharing the value of learning how to take effective notes from the textbook and class material, rather than preparing through rote memorization. Sandy shared how valuable it was to explore how people learn in different ways, along with learning complementary study skills.

While students were exposed to time management strategies in the FYE course, they felt adopting the strategies was a more gradual process. For example, Tyler shared they adopted these strategies over time when they struggled to achieve success using their own practices. At the time of the interview, Tyler stated they were training other student peer mentors to support students with time management, informed by their belief in the value of adopting these strategies.

Confidence and mindset. Students shared the nuanced and hidden behaviours and mindset they felt positioned them for academic success, such as developing confidence,

cultivating relationships with professors, getting to know professors teaching styles, working independently, and attending class to learn the small hints and tricks that support success.

Some participants reported gains in confidence, something they spoke positively about and attributed to success. For example, Ellis shared how having learned reading strategies, group work skills, and oral presentation skills translated into confidence, sharing a particular story of how they began the semester "too nervous to put my hand up" to the end of the semester when they confidently delivered a summary of the whole semester in front of the class. Ellis stated they became "brave" throughout the semester. For Everest, this shift in confidence was born out of academic achievement. Everest referred to their FYE faculty as an "easy marker," noting this was "rejuvenating and motivating for sure, and well timed in the first-semester." Tyler echoed this, stating it was easier to do well in this course, and it helped boost their overall average. Tyler also felt their faculty encouraged them, while working to build their confidence so they could achieve success.

Tyler described they found the FYE course encouraging and helpful, making them feel comfortable in their first semester as they adapted to Canadian educational expectations. For Everest, the FYE course provided a space where they received "guidance" and felt "connected," sharing how their faculty became a source of inspiration, likening their role to one of a mentor. Everest shared the importance of social connections throughout their interview, stating how networking and connecting has been a continuous support throughout their academic journey. Everest also shared the opportunity to envision their future self, combined with the conversation on the importance of sacrifice now for future success put life into perspective and reframed the work being done in the present as the way in which you can set yourself up for success. Everest described how the FYE course provided a space for visioning and mentorship:

> It was an amazing class…And I found that connection between us [faculty and student]. A mentor… once you find that person that has been there and done that, you can pick their brain so much. It's hard to find mentors because everyone has their own lives, and if there is a way you can connect with them, it's awesome.

For others, the course modelled the importance of learning to adapt to different teaching styles. For example, Jordan described learning the importance of being able to adapt based on the teaching style of the professor, stating faculty who read verbatim from slides required a different approach to note taking than those who provided insight and elaboration. Everest highlighted the importance of being able to work independently, something they referred to as "self-teaching." Everest expanded on this to explain in order to achieve success students must learn to take initiative for their learning,

> …having the initiative to go to the teacher to talk to them after the lecture, or emailing them, meeting with them for help, getting a tutor, all the stuff that is offered at the school, writing centre, academic success centre, anything that will help you out with that.

Everest described this as something they acquired being back in school and in a foundational program, not exclusively in the FYE course. Jordan echoed this, highlighting the importance of attending class to acquire the tips and tricks shared by classroom faculty that helped them navigate the college environment.

Application and Transference

Students discussed how they applied the skills learned in the FYE course, their perceptions surrounding the transferability of these skills, and how their ability to apply and transfer the skills could have been better developed. Some students felt the skills taught were not relevant to their particular needs. For example, Jordan described the study skills presented were

built off the "ideal scenario," providing an example of a video shown in class displaying the negative effects of "cramming," suggesting students wake up early and space out studying. Jordan stated as a parent with three children, the suggestions did not apply, but rather would have been applicable to a twenty-year-old living in residence.

When asked if they were applying the skills learned in the FYE course to their other more challenging courses, students' answers were varied. Some described a lack of "flow" and a disconnect between the study skills and their application both in the current program of study, and beyond in future health science careers. For example, Jordan stated, "When we were doing that [study skills] the prof didn't relate it back to any of those professional health careers, so you know, for some people they might not have been able to make those connections." Jordan shared how their professional work experience provided them context, stating, "Whereas not everyone has all that context and not everyone can make those connections." In relation to their experiences with time management, Tyler shared in hindsight, they did not understand the value or transferability of what they were learning,

> I think everyone has different situations, for me, I feel like, back then, "oh this course is easy," you [their faculty] taught me how to do it, just the skills and I didn't even care about it, and I didn't realize that I should use it in and for my other courses. I didn't realize that.

Sandy highlighted new information is being produced faster than textbooks can be updated, emphasizing the importance of teaching students to think, and about the science behind thinking. Whereas, Ellis felt the skills learned in the FYE course were not transferable due to the rote memorization, not the critical thinking skills they required. Jordan struggled with the lack of flow of the study skills content and their perception it did not relate back to the program content.

Students shared they would have been more likely to enact the strategies if they saw the connection between study skills and their future academic careers and professions. Jordan shared the importance of being able to make connections between what is being learned and their future career path. Jordan appreciated clarification of the application of graphing in their other mathematics course: the professor shared reading sonograms in the field required graphing skills, and for Jordan, this connection made the skill feel logical. Similarly, Tyler stated having upper-year students sharing their experiences with time management would have made the strategies they struggled to adopt, more believable. Sandy noted a focus on the "why" behind the study skills would have been helpful in making connections, sharing an example of one thought leader (motivational speaker) who presents what successful people do alongside the proof of why it works.

Re-envisioning the FYE Course Experience

Students shared many areas for change, growth, or improvement in the FYE course, which are organized into the following sub-themes: 1) timing; 2) curriculum; and 3) visions for pedagogical change.

Timing. Students shared challenges with the timing of this course. This challenge was expressed in different ways including the amount of contact or instructional time, the timing of skills development in relation to the student academic lifecycle, and the value of the instructional time spent in the FYE course. First, students shared challenges with the quantity of contact time. For example, Ellis felt assumptions were made about students' engagement and energy levels, resulting in the delivery of shorter classes. Ellis shared this was challenging as they learn best in class, through oral explanations and "listening," and struggle to self-motivate at home. Ellis would have preferred to learn the material in class, as they struggled to self-pace and chunk

material that could have been more effectively delivered in class. Similarly, Jordan described "very short" classes during the success portion, contrasted by a hurried second half (healthcare content), where things became rushed.

Secondly, students shared frustrations in regard to the timing of when skills were taught. For example, Sandy described the timing as "redundant," a sentiment echoed by other participants. Sandy gave context to this frustration, noting the very skills being assessed in the FYE course have already been required for academic success in other more demanding classes. In Sandy's opinion, the timing of when strategies were taught versus when students were required to enact them, affected students' ability to engage, stating students "lost interest in it," a factor that they suggested impacted students' ability to engage with the course.

Lastly, students shared concerns about the amount of instructional time dedicated to study skills. Both Sandy and Jordan acknowledged the value of these skills in higher education, but shared a belief these skills should be taught elsewhere. Both of these participants were mature students and felt these skills should be taught in secondary school, or by on campus support services as required. As Jordan put it, "for an adult who has been in the working force for a long time I found the first six weeks a waste of time completely." Sandy felt the study skills content should have been delivered in the way of online resources or handouts instead, noting that the time spent in this class could have been invested in a part-time job or spent with their child.

> We are already having to do tests and submitting and implementing these study strategies anyway. So, now you're getting marked on that and still having to contribute in that capacity. And, I'm being tested on this. I'm being tested on study skills and that is taking

up time that I could be studying for other things. I think I told the teacher that, "Do you know how frustrating it is to spend time studying study skills instead of biology?

Sandy contextualized this frustration by stating that the entire preparatory certificate program was redundant, but was required to upgrade marks and gain access to future programs.

Curriculum. Students offered suggestions on how the course curriculum could have better positioned them for academic success. Ellis shared strategies for "memorizing material" would have been helpful for their other more challenging courses that relied on rote memorization. Similarly, Everest stated note-taking and learning how to memorize material were requirements for success in the program, and that students must develop their abilities to work and learn independently. Students also described and suggested learning strategies that would move beyond basic study skills. For example, Sandy described that traditional study strategies were "old news." Students shared learning about neuroscience, memory, and stress reduction techniques would have been useful in their personal and academic growth. Sandy stated learning, grounded in neuroscience and how the brain works under stress, is in fact "the science behind learning," explaining how this could augment the efficacy of the various strategies taught within the course.

Sandy also shared their desire to learn more about stress reduction and the "why" in relation to learning and brain functioning. Sandy elaborated, explaining the brain turns off during stress and emphasized the importance of students understanding this and its impact on learning. Sandy shared the importance of learning "stress reducing meditation" activities such as EFT [emotional freedom technique] tapping or yoga. In addition to embedding principles of neuroscience, memory, and stress reduction, Sandy shared leadership would also be a good curricular addition, stating study skills are important in the "now," but over time, leadership

skills have the ability to make any student successful. Sandy also brought to light the fact that critical thinking skills, (a learning outcome of a second semester course) would be well timed for introduction in the first semester.

Students explained career clarity as an important leaning outcome, and some made the connection between this outcome and their own personal self-defined notion of success. Jordan shared they did not feel encouraged in their chosen career field and spoke of the struggle for career clarity faced by many students, referring to it as "flip-flopping." Jordan explained how students knew fragments of information in relation to future career paths, and students in this course would creatively put the pieces together. Participants felt a knowledgeable faculty with healthcare experience could likely have done this, or at the very least, made appropriate referrals.

Jordan, supported by other students, shared the importance of feeling supported and building confidence in their future career choice, elaborating on this to suggest the FYE course be envisioned as a space to connect students with professionals in the health science field. Jordan suggested the power of connecting to current industry professionals through video interviews or in person, whereby Everest offered field trips and guest speakers as a means to connect. Jordan shared the usefulness of interviewing professionals in the field in other courses, and the value of talking with someone who has followed your trajectory. Students noted the course did not take a "deep dive into any of the careers" outside of those in their faculty's area of expertise (for example, those who were professional nurses shared their insights), but other professions were left unexplored.

Visions for pedagogical change. Broadly speaking, threaded throughout the participants' experiences were comments on the pedagogical approaches employed by faculty.

Woven into these stories were strategies for increasing engagement, and visions of meeting students where they are at.

Engaging students. Students shared that engagement was key, and that faculty, particularly those in the FYE course, should work to actively engage students in class and make themselves available to students outside of class. Everest and Tyler described their faculty were the source of engagement. Everest described the connection they had to their faculty, noting they became a mentor, and have remained connected through social media. Everest described their faculty as inspirational, and even went as far as to state they provided a "pump up before the weekend started." They further discussed the "energy" of the classroom setting, advocating for activities in class, prompting them to envision their future self and their faculty's ability to inspire them to think about the short-term sacrifice required for longer term success that helped with "putting life into perspective."

Jordan shared the connection between students and faculty matters felt more important in their FYE course than in other courses. They described disengagement, and offered pedagogical and instructional approaches that could, in their view, increase engagement in what was often a "passive" learning environment. They shared an example, where their faculty was dismissive when they shared and spoke aloud in class, something Jordan felt was "a teaching style thing," but recognized that "at some point you just stop caring and stop answering." Jordan suggested that faculty, "Engage with your students rather than being a podium at the front." Diverse instructional strategies such as role play were more highly valued by Jordan over the videos played in class, where they felt it was "pretty easy to check out." Similarly, Ellis suggested engagement could have been enhanced through the use of visuals such as graphic organizers and timelines that would better show "the whole picture," which would support their ability to

memorize and recall information. Ellis shared that "stories," especially ones that shed light on the history of what they were learning, would have been helpful and Sandy highlighted the importance of using current information, noting it is one of the strategies that best engages students.

Most participants mentioned how beneficial more active, experiential learning would have been. Everest described themselves as a kinesthetic learner, sharing they would have benefitted from field trips or the opportunity to learn from their future field of study. Tyler described the importance of engaging with upper-year students to show the application and efficacy of the strategies, stating if second- or third-year students were to share their experiences, for example with time management, newer students would be more likely to try it in the moment, rather than waiting years, and applying strategies when the content became more challenging.

Assessment was noted in relation to the development of confidence or as a factor related to disengagement and frustration. Referring to disengagement, Jordan suggested success would come along with a better explanation of assignment expectations and "in-depth rubrics." Sandy shared a different view on the role of faculty in student engagement, noting the responsibility for student engagement is shared between the student and faculty. Sandy described that persistence toward achieving a goal is inherent rather than something that could be inspired in the success course stating, "People are going to be successful or not on their own ingenuity of achieving their goals." Sandy did not feel an FYE course could, or should take on the role of inspiring students to be successful. Building off the subtheme of engagement, participants suggested faculty respond to students' needs in the moment by meeting them where they are at.

Meeting students where they are at. Students shared that their FYE course experience was influenced by their faculty's responsiveness to their unique needs. Some described this as a

means of engagement, while others described it as good teaching. Jordan shared an example of a faculty from another course who was able to "be real" with students, and modify the lesson when students were visibly struggling with life outside of the classroom. Jordan offered an example of responsive teaching when a faculty stopped and responded to the fact that students received poor assignment marks for another class, posted through their Learning Management System, midway through their class. What stood out about this to Jordan was the faculty's ability to see the entirety of the program, recognizing this teaching moment did not help students in their course, but rather they saw beyond the one course they were teaching.

Jordan emphasized the importance of faculty knowing their students and building a responsive curriculum. Further, Jordan stated they would have been more likely to apply the skills for success if their faculty had been invested and understanding, noting that they never felt encouraged they would be a good nurse, something they noted was "the main agenda of the course." This was also of importance to Tyler who suggested faculty get to know their students' real needs by asking questions such as, "What does success mean to you?" "What kind of goal do you have?" and "What is your strategy or your thoughts about being a success?" Alternatively, Tyler suggested students could complete an assignment to define success to guide teaching. Jordan built on this understanding, stating, "You can't do everything for everyone, but you can have some sort of median and at least check the temperature. . ." They shared the mix of direct from high-school students, mature students, and students who are parents, creates unique needs that need to be considered. Similarly, Jordan suggested faculty:

> [G]et a list of what is everyone's background… you'll have words like mother, you'll have finance manager, you'll have customer service, you'll have all these different ones, food service worker, things that are part of people's backgrounds. And you can look at

> skills that are related to that and how they're going to relate to what the person wants to do.

Jordan expanded on this, explaining that in their opinion, resentment is born when unique needs are not considered within the context of the classroom.

Participants suggested that there is an intersection where engagement and responsiveness meet; they shared how their faculty can motivate and inspire learning by actively engaging students by being responsive to their needs in the moment. For example, Jordan shared their experience in the FYE course was "passive" and offered the following:

> [I]f the teachers are active in wanting to teach, wanting to be there, wanting to make it interesting, also having a good gauge on the class, and seeing when are they totally just checking out, maybe it's not the plan today to do this, but maybe let's just take a break and make it fun. It was very like, I am going to read the slides and here is the content, doesn't matter if you're actually paying attention or not, is what it felt like, and if you are going to be successful in that course or in anything, you at least have to have some sort of interest in it.

To other participants, this was described as patience. Everest explained that faculty need to "be more patient with [their] students and try to comprehend them;" they felt that faculty should put themselves in their students' shoes and cater to the needs of students in the FYE course. Similarly, Ellis mentioned patience, something they described as the ability of faculty to suspend assumptions about student engagement and disengagement,

> I understand that some students just don't care because they think it is just an unimportant course, or at least not as important as chemistry or biology. But actually, if the teacher would like to give more patience to the students instead of just assuming the

> students don't care, and most of the cases it is true, they don't care, but if *you* (emphasis in original) show that you care about the course that you are teaching right now, the student will take you seriously. But, if you say "I understand you just don't want to learn," but here is the course I have to teach you anyways, and you are in a slump, and you are in a negative feeling to deliver to your students, then they will say "she doesn't care, why do we care?"

Ellis shared the patience of their FYE faculty when they responded to the individual needs of international students by providing them with more time to complete in-class work (allowing them to submit later in their office, rather than at the end of class). For students like Jordan, patience was expressed as a hope. Jordan wished for "forgiveness," describing an instant where they made errors in an assignment, and rather than the opportunity to learn and grow from the mistakes in the context of the FYE course, they felt the experience of preparing a written assignment without knowing the expectation of an academic paper, and subsequent support and help left a "bad taste" in their mouth.

Situating the Researcher in the Faculty and Student Narrative

My experience as a teacher and student affairs professional led me to this inquiry. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest, qualitative research situates the researcher in the world, making the ordinary visible in new or different ways. In my role as a student affairs professional and faculty member at the institution, I entered into this research already immersed in the community, knowing and speaking their language (Fontana & Frey, 2000), eager to explore the known in new and different ways. My research journal became the site where through critical self-reflection, I explored my positionality, "confessing" how I understood the FYE course phenomenon and questioning what I thought to be true based on the stories told by faculty and

students. This confessional tale, as captured in my research journal, traces my evolution in understanding, whereby the experiences of my participants extended my knowledge and allowed me to arrive at new understandings.

It has been my experience in the past, working with faculty across the college landscape, that many college faculty are unaware of the intricacies of the student experience, and further, the unique academic and social developmental needs of first year students. Many post-secondary faculty with whom I have conversed throughout my career, have shared their own experience with higher education. These have either been stories of university triumph, trademarked by tales of survival, where success was their responsibility, or stories of just getting by, where their education in a trade may have been foundational, but their knowledge was acquired in the field, not in a classroom. It was my understanding that these experiences deeply impacted how faculty approach teaching and learning, having a ripple effect on how students experience the classroom the curriculum, and assigned faculty. I entered into this work believing:

> My inquiry is positioned around the idea that student persistence in post-secondary education is multifaceted and the very reasons why students leave college are not the same as why they stay. Many students arrive in post-secondary underprepared; one of the ways in which this emerges is in their lack of academic skills such as reading comprehension, note-taking, finding and evaluating research, studying and test-taking, synthesizing information, academic writing, and often most apparent–time management and ability to manage procrastination. This converges with the rise of university and graduate level educated college faculty who use their experiences as students to develop their expectations for students, in my experience and opinion, often failing to consider the

> difference in preparedness between college, university and graduate students. (Research Journal, July 4, 2016)

This assumption was challenged throughout the inquiry. The faculty interviewed described the complexity of twenty-first century learners, and all faculty described the many ways in which they support students' non-cognitive development in the FYE course. Further, their pedagogical approaches revealed the thoughtful ways in which they seek to inspire and engage students, as well as make learning meaningful.

At the outset of this journey, informed by work with students, I predicted a lack of student readiness, and hypothesized faculty might struggle to tune into this level of preparedness. When faculty described their role as coach, detailed how they aim to inspire students, and shared how they strive to be responsive, I viewed this as evidence of their keen understanding of the complexity of student needs. Students shared a range of feelings and experiences, many affirming what I thought to be true: learning how to learn is a complex skill to acquire, and in the context of the FYE course, the skill can be difficult to apply in other more challenging courses. At the outset, I wondered if faculty's curricular, pedagogical, and instructional approaches might reveal a lack of understanding of the complexity of first-semester students' needs. I found, however, faculty and student participants told a different story, revealing faculty do approach the FYE course from a place of deep care and understanding, suggesting other factors may affect the quality of experience that is had in the FYE course:

> My time today with Kris alerted me just how isolating the act of teaching can be, especially for part-time faculty, and more so for those on smaller regional or satellite campuses. Kris oozed care and concern for their students, but, shared that they didn't feel they had institutional support in revisioning their course or reinventing their teaching

> practices. Together, Kris and I shared the common challenges of twenty-first century learners and spoke of the complex learning skills that are required for success in health science programs. We spoke of the instructional strategies that, in their opinion, just weren't working, many of which affirmed some of my experiences with FYE course students. But, something really special happened today for me. Kris humanized these challenges, contextualizing them in the realities of the classroom, not in a lack of knowing, an unwillingness, or a lack of effort. It has never been clearer; faculty might know how to contextualize how to learn, but they need the resources and support to make it happen. (Research Journal, September 19, 2018)

Hearing from both faculty and students allowed me to form a more fulsome understanding of the FYE course experience, and through this, my understanding evolved:

> Brown's famous words on courage and vulnerability are ringing loud in my head today, "If you're not in the arena also getting your ass kicked, I am not interested in your feedback." As I walk along this journey, I am becoming more aware of the intricacies of teaching, specifically, of part-time teaching, and teaching on a smaller campus. In my role as a student affairs practitioner, I have the privilege of approaching teaching in a very unique way: one course at a time, with access to the knowledge, skills, and resources of an entire student affairs department. The reality of teaching described by the participants was not the reality I have experienced, or even envisioned at the outset. Today's experience revealed the potential benefit of student affairs staff teaching an FYE course, but it also illuminated that perhaps it is not that they are the best, but rather that they are the best resourced. (Research Journal, September 28, 2018)

The evolution in my own thinking stemmed from the experience of hearing and making meaning of faculty and student narratives has not only provided insight into the dissonance that exists between faculty pedagogical and instructional approaches and the student experience, but also provided insight into how student success is conceptualized in an FYE course, leading to the interpretation presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Summary

Throughout the inquiry, the FYE course faculty discussed the many functions of the FYE course and the myriad of ways student success is supported within the context of their classrooms, including teaching students how to learn and supporting student transition into and through their certificate program. As coach or mentor, faculty aim to make learning relevant and transferable. Challenges and opportunities exist at the institutional level and in the classroom; these include the perceived value of the course, curricular resources, faculty capacity, the availability of support, the amount of instructional time available, timing when skills were taught, and physical spaces and class sizes. Student participants shared the strategies, skills, confidence, and mindset learned and acquired in the course, revealing their ability to apply and transfer the learning. Student visioning of the FYE course spoke to timing, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches that would increase engagement and respond to their individual needs. I concluded this chapter by revealing how my understanding of the FYE course experience evolved throughout the inquiry, setting the stage for my interpretation of data shared in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE FYE COURSE EXPERIENCE

> *Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to* be*, it must* become*… looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future.*
>
> ~Paulo Freire (1970, p. 72, emphasis in original)

This inquiry sought to explore the emic perspectives of a three-credit FYE course in a certificate program at a medium-sized Ontario college. It was my hope that, by bringing the voices of faculty and students to the forefront, this inquiry would provide qualitative insight into how the FYE course contributes to the first-year student experience. As I began this inquiry (and as documented in Chapter One and revisited in Chapter Four), I had some hypotheses and preconceptions of what might arise from the data. My experience in student affairs and in the classroom, where student success is the focus of my work, formed the basis of these assumptions and beliefs. Through the use of critical-self-reflection in my doctoral coursework, as shared in Chapter One and Three, I was able to explore these assumptions, arriving at a deeper understanding of how my values, beliefs, and assumptions influence not only my identity as a researcher, but also my understanding of what I thought to be true. This awareness encouraged me to detach from my own practice and look at the FYE phenomenon through a beginner's mind (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). Rather than allow these assumptions to guide my investigation, a beginner's mind invited me to awaken my sense of curiosity, exploring the student

experience from the vantage point of the faculty and students, providing a fresh, new understanding that is informed on the lived experiences of the individuals I work to serve.

The fact that the phenomenon of FYE courses have been well-researched meant that I was stepping into previously chartered waters. The FYE course has been less frequently studied in Canadian higher education programs, and even less so in college and certificate level programs. Further, studies of mandatory FYE courses continued to be relatively absent from the practice literature and qualitative data on the faculty and student experience could not be found at the time this inquiry was proposed.

When setting out on this journey, I was aware my purposefully chosen institution of study housed a FYE course that was relatively new (less than ten years old at the time this inquiry began) and has undergone revision to include core academic content in addition to its focus on supporting students transition into, through, and beyond the certificate program. The research literature overviewed in Chapter Two shows the way in which FYE courses support student success. But even knowing this, I was unsure how faculty understood the FYE course, and how their understanding informed their pedagogical and instructional approaches to supporting student success. Further, I was curious about how students experienced the first-year experience course, in relation to their understanding of success. I continued to be interested in viewing the FYE course from the lens of faculty and student to unearth a richer understanding of how student success is conceptualized and supported in the FYE course. I was unsure how faculty approached this course, and if students were able to apply what they learned in their FYE course to their other more challenging courses, and if what they learned was acquired as hypothetical or knowledge, or if they were able to apply this as skill.

The discussion that follows will begin with a summary of the themes that emerged from analyzing the faculty and student interview data. I then explore the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and research on FYE courses, student persistence, grit and growth mindsets that informed this inquiry. My own interpretations and reflections are threaded throughout, revealing the evolution in my own thinking and understanding about the FYE course phenomenon, and the first-year student experience.

Revisiting My Research Questions: An Exploration of the Inquiry's Themes

In this section, I summarize the themes that emerged from analyzing the faculty and student data to help set the stage for the interpretations that follow. Given the fact FYE courses are a relied upon student success initiative, this inquiry sought to provide much-needed qualitative insight into how they are experienced and understood by faculty and students, and how they might be re-envisioned to better meet student needs and enhance transferability of skills. This inquiry explored the following question: *How are FYE courses understood by the different stakeholders involved? How do first year experience courses meet the needs of first year, first semester college learners? How do first year students define success?* Faculty provided insight on the goals of the FYE course and their pedagogical and instructional approaches. Students shared their understanding of success, how the FYE course influenced their self-defined notion of success and provided insight on their ability to transfer and apply what they had learned in the FYE course to their other courses.

In Chapter Four, the research findings were organized by faculty experience and student experience. Three overarching themes emerged for faculty: 1) role and purpose of the FYE course; 2) pedagogical and instructional approaches; and 3) challenges and

opportunities. Four overarching themes emerged for students: 1) student experiences in a FYE course; 2) acquiring the skills for success; 3) application and transference and; 4) re-envisioning the FYE course experience.

Faculty Voices: A Summary

Role and purpose of the FYE course. Faculty explained the role and purpose of the FYE course as twofold, to teach students how to learn and scaffold academic success and to support the student transition into and through their current program. This function was explained as building the "foundation upon which a successful academic career can be built." The unique function of the larger certificate program was described as "a bridge between high school and post-secondary," noting the under preparedness of many of its students and the role of the course on supporting students transition into the certificate program through the instruction of various learning and study skills. This function, described by some as orientating students to college, also involved supporting a range of needs such as making students aware of the supports on campus, connecting them with resources, providing opportunities for career exploration and career clarity, and creating space for the development of meaningful teacher-student and peer relationships.

Pedagogical and instructional approaches. Faculty shared the pedagogical and instructional approaches employed, including taking on the role of coach or mentor, making learning meaningful and making learning transferable. They all shared the belief that the FYE course curriculum and learning experience should be responsive or emergent to meet the unique and individual needs of students. Faculty explained that as teachers they have a duty to respond to student needs in the moment, changing their plans

for the day to accommodate the developmental needs emerging through deep listening, to students' verbal and non-verbal cues.

Challenges and opportunities. Faculty noted challenges, in their opinion, that impacted the enactment of the FYE course, and ultimately, the student experience. There was an abundance of opportunities threaded throughout the challenges, whereby the student experience could be improved. Institutional or macro level challenges included the perceived value of the course, by both students and administrators. Faculty also noted the importance of the skills and abilities of FYE course faculty and the importance of feeling supported. They described informal professional learning communities, partnerships with core content course instructors, mentorships, and pre-developed curriculum or a course textbook to guide weekly learning as forms of support. It was suggested the content of student's other more challenging courses had the potential to transform how the FYE course was taught and delivered. Time was also mentioned; in relation to timing when to introduce academic skills and strategies, the quantity of instructional time available, or in terms of the time required to support the complexity of the student transition. Physical space and class size also emerged as important to the FYE course experience.

Student Voices: A Summary

Student experiences in a FYE course. The first main theme, student experiences in a FYE course, displayed an array of student experiences, ranging from positive to negative. As shown through the findings presented in Chapter 4, no two student needs were exactly the same, however, similarities and differences were strung throughout. Students shared a common desire to do well academically, and for most, to gain entry

into a diploma or degree program. With the exception of one, who had decided to move into a human service program, they shared a common goal to move into nursing (either Bachelor of Science, Nursing or Registered Practical Nursing).

Acquiring the skills for success. Students shared a common desire to have support navigating the post-secondary environment; this took the form of acquiring the learning skills, strategies, confidence, and mindset that would help them be successful. Time management, goal setting, groupwork, oral presentations, studying, research, and reading comprehension were all described as learning skills related to academic success. Of these skills, time management was most emphasized. Students described developing confidence, cultivating relationships with professors, getting to know professors teaching styles, working independently, and attending class to learn the small hints and tricks that support success were all behaviours and mindsets supporting their success.

Application and transference. Throughout their stories, students continually circled back to their ability, or lack thereof, to apply and transfer what they learned in the FYE course. Students shared they would have been more likely to apply and transfer the skills taught in the FYE course if they saw the connection between their future academic programs and professions. Further, students shared learning the evidence or science (described by students as the "why") would have supported their academic skill acquisition.

Re-envisioning the FYE course experience. Students shared many areas for change, growth, or improvement in the first-year experience course. They shared the myriad of ways in which time impacted their FYE course experience including, the amount of contact or instructional time, the timing of when skills were taught in relation

to the student academic lifecycle, and the value of the time spent in the FYE course. Students also offered suggestions on how the course curriculum could have better positioned them for academic success, urging for the inclusion of strategies around neuroscience, memory, leadership and stress reduction. Career clarity was highlighted as an important learning outcome, and some made the connection between this outcome and their own personal self-defined notion of success. Threaded throughout student experiences were visions of pedagogical change, where students emphasized the importance of engaging students and a curricular and instructional experience that meets students where they are at.

Interpretations of Findings

The overarching research question central to this inquiry explored how FYE courses are understood by faculty and students, how first-year students define success, and how FYE courses meet the needs of first year, first semester learners. In this section, I explore and interpret the findings in relation to the theoretical framework informing this inquiry and the current literature on first-year experience courses, student persistence, grit and growth mindsets, through a discussion of the emerging themes during data analysis.

Role and Purpose of the FYE Course

Faculty commonly shared that the FYE course functions to teach students how to learn, scaffolds their academic success, and supports their transition into and through their program of study. Faculty noted the differing levels of ability and preparedness of the twenty-first century learner, complementing this with comments about the potential of FYE courses to level the playing field through the instruction of learning and study skills. As Ryan highlighted,

> The general intelligence across all students is very, very similar. There is not much differentiation. The difference comes in with how you approach learning. And if you approach learning with techniques that are proven to help you learn, you are going to do better.

As such, faculty emphasized their belief that learning and study skill instruction can benefit students by equipping them with the technical skills required for learning even in light of learning disabilities, time away from education, the transition from secondary school, or in succeeding as an English language learner. These observations are widely supported by the research literature on the efficacy of FYE courses (Barton & Donahue, 2009; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Cuseo, 1991; Padgett et al., 2013; Porter & Swing, 2006; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Vander Schee, 2011; Weisgerber, 2005; Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989).

Time management was echoed as an important skill for students by all faculty, for some, it was emphasized as the *most* important skill in relation to student success, substantiating Yorke's (2000) previously shared finding that underdeveloped time management skills interrupt students' ability to be academically successful in higher education. Further, faculty shared the importance of supporting students' social development in the classroom, a finding aligning with Tinto's (1999; 2012) model of student integration, impacting students' ability to develop a sense of belonging and thrive in higher education.

Pedagogical and Instructional Approaches

Faculty provided insight into their pedagogical and instructional approaches to the FYE course. It remains unknown if their approaches are unique to the FYE course, or

rather, if this is a fixed part of their teaching identity, extending into all of the classes they teach. They shared an important element of their role as an FYE faculty was to inspire and motivate students. For example, one faculty participant explained the importance of supporting students to persist despite challenge, noting how self-improvement takes great discipline, something they felt could be inspired. Some noted the link between time management and mindset, indicating the many competing demands vying for student's interest, and the role they could play in directing attention. This approach appeared to be rooted in a deep care and concern for their students; a palpable sense of optimism and faith in their untapped intellectual potential. One faculty shared their approach was rooted in inspirational teachers from their past, noting a student remembers not what they learned, but how their teacher made them feel, showing their deep commitment to a student-centred approach, steeped in the ethics of care (Noddings, 1995). Another shared the importance of "giving back" to their students, describing a one-sided exchange, whereby they imparted wisdom on the learner. This notion of "giving back" reveals a potential lack of reciprocity, whereby the act of teaching may be self-serving, and the student a passive recipient, rather than an active co-constructer of learning. Aligned with humanistic and constructivist views, the faculty in this inquiry all described some of the ways in which their role as a classroom teacher and the resultant learning environment they fostered, influenced the student experience.

Of greatest significance to me in this inquiry was faculty's perception of the importance of inspiring motivation. For faculty who described their role as inspiration, mentor or coach their approach appeared to be connected to their understanding of the perseverance it takes to achieve success. This challenged my understanding of the

identity of FYE faculty. Although this approach is well-grounded in the literature and evidence on mindset (Dweck, 2006) and grit (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2016), at the outset of this inquiry, I was unsure if faculty perceived this to be their role. As such, I wonder if I did not anticipate faculty's understanding of their role would be the missing piece to the FYE puzzle, whether it would explain why students had such mixed experiences in the FYE course, and why the students I supported in my learning strategy practice failed to use and apply the skills taught in their FYE course.

In actuality, faculty's efforts to debunk the common assumption that intelligence predicts academic outcomes, could be viewed as an orientation to grit-oriented thinking and a growth, rather than fixed mindset, an intervention empirically proven to increase the academic performance of at-risk students (Paunesku et al., 2015). As one faculty suggested,

> There is a fallacy out there that people believe. And I think the general population believes this: If you are smart, you will perform well academically and, if you're not intelligent, you won't. It is unfortunate because I don't think it's true. I think its people who develop these academic skills, perform well. And people who don't, don't necessarily.

This affirms the potential effect the development of grit or the shift from a fixed to growth mindset can have on academic performance, college completion, and long-term success. As Duckworth et al. (2007) suggest, it can be difficult for learners to conceptualize the idea of staying with difficult tasks and "working longer" (p. 1098), yet this outlook has the potential to tune into untapped intellectual potential. It was clear the faculty interviewed in this inquiry enacted mindset and grit coaching in the FYE course.

Although mindset coaching may be a proven piece of the student success puzzle, faculty's lack of critical awareness about the oppression and marginalization experienced by many students, may result in a pedagogical and curricular approach failing to consider the lived reality of their students. The conversation about grit, mindset, and mentorship failed to acknowledge hard work is not enough for all students. Further, there appeared to be little awareness about the role a FYE course may play in disrupting the very systems limiting a student's success. Mentorship in the FYE course should be further explored to reveal ways in which this approach may better work in service to all students.

Challenges and Opportunities

Faculty spoke of some of the challenges experienced while teaching the FYE course, highlighting the opportunities existing for continual course improvement. Faculty noted throughout students' first semester, the opinion the FYE course is a "bird course," or of less value than their other core content courses, persists. Others felt linking the FYE content to their other more challenging course content was the antidote to the devaluing of the FYE course. Faculty shared the perceived value of the FYE course across the college landscape was problematic, suggesting this perception was rooted in administrator and student understanding of the course, and the intricacies of a whole campus approach to supporting student success. Emphasis was placed on the college system's reliance on part-time or contract faculty who are more transient and perhaps less versed in the larger college ecosystem, but often more connected to their professional practice. Faculty suggested, in their experience, some administrators view the FYE course as an afterthought, resulting in the assignment of faculty who may choose otherwise. One participant felt the course was viewed by administrators as one anyone

can teach. This was echoed by another participant who referred to the course as a "filler," one often assigned to faculty "who are not interested in student development theory or learning theories." This understanding revealed a new perspective to me as a researcher, as the course has traditionally been favourably viewed by student services for its potential to support student success. In my opinion, faculty resisted the devalued position of the FYE course, revealing the pride they take in teaching the course, and the value they assign to its importance. Just as Dewey (1916; 1938/1997) affirms the importance of students actively defining the purpose of learning, it was clear faculty aspired to be part of the FYE conversation, using their expertise on learning and student transition to define the purpose of learning in the FYE course, and where appropriate, to contribute to larger institutional conversations on student success.

Faculty were acutely aware of the ripple effect of how the FYE course is understood by administrators on the recruitment of faculty with a solid understanding of student development and well-versed in the remediation of academic skill deficiencies. Similarly, some students described faculty who, in their opinion were not responsive to their needs. Complementary to Piaget's (1952) theory of intellectual adaptation, it was clear students were in a constant state of flux as they transitioned into the health sciences, and their FYE faculty played a role in their ability to achieve equilibrium, or for some, to their inability, contributing to their continued state of disequilibrium.

As faculty shared their desire to constantly evolve their pedagogical, curricular, and instructional techniques to meet the evolving needs of students, achieving equilibrium was a strong undertone in the faculty narrative (Piaget, 1952). As Noddings (1995) suggests, "Caring implies a continuous search for competence," bringing with it a

desire “to do our very best for the objects in our care” (p. 676). Within this theme, faculty echoed the importance of support and professional development, reaffirming the faculty’s desire to improve the student experience and modelling their level of care and commitment.

Faculty shed light on many opportunities for improvement, emphasizing the need for FYE course faculty to have certain skills and professional experience. It was noted faculty who have experience providing one-on-one learning and counselling support, have a unique understanding of what students need, and are able to conceptualize the student lifecycle. It was suggested that predicting the timeliness of student pain points, and an in-depth understanding of the resources available to students on campus, were important skills for FYE faculty. It was also suggested that faculty require an understanding of learning skills and strategies, a skill set that, in their opinion, is less frequently possessed by the content expert faculty that are now required to teach a new blended FYE course requiring more subject matter expertise. This was well captured by a participant who stated, faculty are likely to “lean toward what they know best” and an expressed concern that future versions of the FYE course may stray further from academic and social development toward health-care subject matter content. It was suggested this skill set could be developed through professional development, teaching communities, and connecting content experts with learning skill experts.

Faculty participants suggested that a coordinated effort between FYE and core subject matter experts is an essential piece of the FYE course improvement puzzle. Similarly, Keup and Petschauer (2011) stress the importance of a FYE course leadership team, a suggestion that would likely be supportive in advocating for course needs,

onboarding, supporting new faculty, and supporting institutional understanding of the FYE course. Keup and Petschauer state student affairs professionals are often overlooked for their expertise, but can bring an important insight to student development, campuses resources and supports to the FYE conversation. It was apparent faculty are eager to collaborate with the wider campus community, in their quest to deliver a high-quality learning experience, and develop their own state of equilibrium (Piaget, 1952). Further, the skill set of faculty should be more closely examined to develop a professional development plan leveraging faculty's desire to grow and enhance their pedagogical and curricular approaches. Ideally, an FYE course leadership team could oversee the enactment of such a plan, while supporting the recruitment and onboarding of FYE faculty.

Student Experiences in a FYE Course

Although this inquiry did not seek to measure student satisfaction with their FYE course experience, their narratives provided great insight into what is and is not helpful during their transition experience. Students described their experiences in the success course along a continuum of engagement versus disengagement, detailing both positive and negative experiences. To some students, the FYE course was a valuable part of their first-year experience, for others, it was not. Students' experiences in the FYE course varied based on stage of life, and their prior experience with learning. Two mature students, identified the course was of low importance, suggesting they had already developed the skills taught in the work world, or they could be acquired outside of a credit-bearing course, such as through the use of student success services. Some described disconnect between the students and faculty, suggesting this disconnect

impacted their learning. Some suggested the FYE course might hold the potential to teach valuable and important skills if improvements were made, leading me to believe that despite their experience, they saw value in the FYE course as a curricular component of their certificate program.

On the other hand, for another mature student participant, the FYE course was described as their favourite class, setting them up well for their academic and professional career. For others, who identified as English language learners, the course held great value in supporting their transition into an English academic environment. Some credit the experience for positively shifting their perspective of college, sharing the many ways in which they grew, academically and socially, preparing them to overcome failure, conceptualize the sacrifice it would take to be successful, or adapt to a Western learning environment. This narrative revealed for some students, the FYE course served to engage the learner in the purpose of learning (Dewey, 1916; 1938/1997). It was clear some students perceived a specific benefit in the FYE course (for example, learning Western educational standards) as the desire to achieve equilibrium was commonly woven throughout the student narrative. They described the challenge of disequilibrium, and for many, recounted how throughout the process of their certificate program, they developed competence as a learner (Piaget, 1952; 1964).

The variance in the student experience is well explained by Dewey's (1938/1997) notion that although learning comes from experience, not all learning experiences are "genuinely or equally educative" (p. 25). Dewey suggests learning experiences, especially unfavourable ones, have the potential to "narrow the field of further experience" (p. 26). Dewey also believed education is never void of experience, but

rather certain types of experiences can “prevent a person from getting out of them what they have to give” (p. 26). This experiential continuum introduced in Chapter One, serves to contextualize the student experience, and as such, student engagement in the FYE course should be further explored to provide insight on whether a mandatory course is more beneficial for engagement than an optional course, in which self-enrolled students may arrive with a greater potential to be engaged.

Acquiring the Skills for Success

As previously cited, Yorke (2000) notes underdeveloped time management skills are likely to interrupt a student’s ability to thrive in higher education. It was no surprise then, time management was the most frequently noted academic skill required for success by both faculty and students. Time management was envisioned as prioritizing tasks, breaking down assignments, managing procrastination, daily, weekly, and semester planning, and balancing competing demands. As suggested by Grayson et al. (2019), high school skill deficiencies do not significantly improve naturally over the course of a student’s academic career. Some of the post-secondary students in this inquiry affirmed this by sharing vivid examples of skills they acquired through direct instruction and modelling in the FYE course, while others affirmed this by acknowledging the skills did not develop until they were required by their other more demanding courses. In addition to time management, participants shared other learning strategies that they acquired and felt supported their academic success, including preparing for and participating in class, goal-setting, learning styles, groupwork, oral presentations, studying, research, and reading comprehension, affirming what was found in the literature: post-secondary

courses that include study skills play a role in student success (Cone & Owens, 1991; Hattie et al., 1996; O'Gara et al., 2009; Wernersbach et al., 2014).

The fact that all students in this inquiry made reference to the importance of time management suggests that, for this particular group of students, there exists a developed degree of self-awareness. It is likely the students who elected to participate in an inquiry on the FYE course may have possessed an acute self-awareness about their own learning needs, revealing at the time of their interview, they had likely already developed competence as a learner, and were likely developing autonomy, while working toward interdependence (Chickering, 1972). Participants also emphasized the important role the FYE course played in supporting their non-academic growth, supporting their social connections with peers, access to student supports, and co-curricular involvement on campus (Choate & Smith, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Student participants affirmed the importance of these relationships to their sense of belonging and over-all student experience (Tinto, 1993, 2012).

In addition to naming the academic and social skills required for success, students described the nuanced and hidden behaviours acquired; developing confidence, cultivating relationships with professors, learning the importance of attending class, and working independently, helped to grown their confidence, shift their mindset, and better position them for academic success.

Although this evolution in confidence and mindset could be correlated to the students' broader progress through their first semester, they did specify this shift was supported by pedagogical approaches, where they received guidance, became connected to supports on campus, and developed academic strategies. Students described learning

how to navigate post-secondary helped them become braver, and through connecting with mentors, they became more inspired. In essence, students described a shift in thinking, affirming Dweck's (2006) finding on the malleability of mindset, and further affirming the approach employed by faculty to inspire and motivate students. Student descriptions of improved academic and social connectedness are an indicator of heightened student engagement, a factor positively correlated to student success (Tinto, 1993).

Some students viewed their instructor as a coach, a strategy Jessup-Anger (2011) describes as effective in engaging students' motivational zones of proximal development and increasing their motivation to learn by helping them appreciate the value of the FYE course curriculum. Further, the perceived ease of the course appealed to students, suggesting institutions weigh the benefits of "providing a more demanding seminar that may lead to greater motivational gains for students in the long run, with, the drawbacks of depleted resources and potentially fewer students enrolled" (p. 113). In this inquiry, the humanistic approach of scaffolding students' skill development, while concurrently building their confidence was reinforced as important by faculty and students.

Many students shared their faculty were a source of motivation and inspiration. One student described feeling disconnected from their FYE faculty; this story affirmed the importance of the faculty relationship on the student engagement puzzle. Prior to this inquiry, I had not realized the significant interpersonal relationship that existed between students and faculty in the FYE course. Within student affairs, where support is typically offered one-on-one, these relationships are foundational to the success of the learning support or the remedial intervention provided to students. Participants' description of the role of FYE faculty revealed the FYE course is first and foremost, relational.

The FYE Course: A Question of Application and Transference

Students shed light on their ability to transfer the skills learned in the FYE course to their other more challenging courses. Faculty insight on the phenomenon of transferring the skills acquired in a success course are layered to provide a deeper and more contextualized response. The findings related to this research question were most surprising to me as a researcher. There was great discrepancy between the approach and goals described by faculty (students transferring and applying these skills in their other courses), and what students experienced.

Students shared they were unable to make the connections between the skills and strategies taught in the FYE course and were, therefore, limited in the application of strategies to their other more challenging courses. As Dewey (1916; 1938/1997) affirms, how students make meaning is rooted in the purpose of learning, their perception of the course, how the course is taught, and the value of the course in meeting their needs. As such, students shared the importance of being able to apply the academic and learning skills being taught, suggesting it was an expectation they had from the course. Although for some, this connection developed over time, many stated they would have been more likely to enact the strategies and skills if they saw the connection to future academic careers and professional identities. Students also shared challenges with the timing of strategy and skill instruction, further affirming the importance of students as active agents in defining the purpose of learning (Dewey, 1916; 1938/1997). For some students, strategies were taught after their application was required in other more challenging courses, disconnecting strategy instruction from the overall purpose of learning. For one student, feeling disconnected from their faculty seemed to affect their ability to engage

with the learning, which likely had a ripple effect on their ability to apply and transfer learning.

As Rogers (1974) suggested, only meaningful learning is significant. In many instances, this inquiry revealed just that. Students shared their connection to the FYE course experience in relation to the relevance and importance they perceived with the strategies, skills, and mindsets taught. Further, students who positively described the FYE course were the same students who described a personal connection to their faculty, or the essence of feeling cared for in the classroom (Noddings, 2007). When the cognitive and affective domain converge Rogers states learning becomes unified, and therefore meaningful. Rogers argues unified learning rarely happens, suggesting "perhaps learning experiences can be judged by their closeness or remoteness to this" (p. 104). As students described their satisfaction with or desire for a responsive FYE course environment, coupled with a faculty who inspired and/or mentored them, they echoed Rogers (1974) thoughts on how faculty should show up in the classroom,

> It pays to be personal and human in the classroom. A humane atmosphere is not only more pleasant for all concerned. It promotes more-and more significant-learning. When attitudes of realness, respect for the individual, understanding of the student's private world are present, exciting things happen. (p. 110)

The FYE course, as a proactive student support or "deliberate intervention" (Varney, n.d., p. 1), leverages the classroom as a space to support student transition into higher education, a process this inquiry suggests is augmented by caring and supportive faculty.

As shared throughout this inquiry, students described feeling engaged when they saw the connection between the skills, strategies, and mindsets taught in the FYE course

and their future area of study or career, a finding that I suggest impacts their ability to apply and transfer the learning. Making learning transferable was discussed as a common intended goal of the FYE course, generally described by faculty as the students' ability to transfer learning and academic skills to concurrent and future learning experiences. All faculty reinforced the importance of students being able to transfer the academic and learning skills taught in the context of their FYE course, sharing the many ways in which this can be endeavoured, such as connecting learning skills to students' other more challenging courses, and connecting the skills to future academic careers. Faculty highlighted how they aim to achieve this in their own teaching, contrasting the picture students painted, whereby application and transference was challenging.

These findings affirm Tinto's (2012) assertion the classroom offers an opportunity to support student transition into higher education, but the dissonance that exists in the FYE course experience sheds light on just how difficult this task is. The dissonance between faculty intent and the student experience reveals the complex nature of supporting the student transition inside the classroom. Faculty participants in this inquiry stressed the importance of responding to students' needs and making learning relevant, but for some students, this was not lived experience, suggesting that FYE curriculum, faculty, and course administrators cannot prescriptively anticipate student needs. As Dewey (1938/1997) suggests, engaging students as active agents in defining the purpose of learning has the power to not only engage learners on a deeper and more connected level, but also to guide the learning by revealing the timely and relevant needs of students. It can, therefore, be suggested that enacting an FYE course alone does not guarantee the complex needs of a first-semester student are cared for, as not all FYE

experiences are “genuinely or equally educative” (Dewey, 1938/1997). Rather, a responsive curriculum that is flexible and accommodates students’ changing needs has the potential to improve the FYE course experience.

Re-envisioning the FYE Course Experience

For many faculty, getting inside students’ heads is one of the trickiest pedagogical tasks (Brookfield, 1995), but it is crucial to improving teaching and learning. As students’ experiences reveal, there are different worlds existing within the same classroom (Perry, 1988), drawing attention to both the diversity of our students, but also to the vast difference in how they experience and contextualize a learning experience. For faculty and student affairs staff, seeing ourselves as practitioners from the students’ differing perspectives allows us to shape and shift our behaviour to engage in the process of becoming more effective. As such, students’ visions for curricular and pedagogical change were most intriguing to me, and perhaps the finding I think has the greatest potential to improve teaching and learning, and as a result, the student experience. During the interview process, participants anecdotally shared the interview process itself was therapeutic, revealing the fact faculty and students want to share their experiences, and to have their voices heard.

Students shared the many ways in which time impacted their FYE course experience including the amount of contact or instructional time, the timing of when skills were taught in relation to the student academic lifecycle, and the value of the time spent in the FYE course. This inquiry revealed learners’ quest for equilibrium (Piaget, 1952) influences what is important; activities not perceived as necessary to achieve equilibrium may be perceived as less important and may “narrow the field of further

experience" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 26). It is, therefore, likely students' perception of the FYE course is influenced by its connection to supporting the achievement of equilibrium. Students offered suggestions on how the course curriculum could have better positioned them for academic success, urging for the inclusion of strategies around neuroscience, memory, leadership, stress reduction, and methods for developing their abilities to work and learn independently, affirming students' desire to be active agents in defining the FYE course experience. Leveraging students to define the FYE course curriculum may widen rather than "narrow" the field of further experience.

Woven throughout the student narrative were detailed accounts of the challenge inherent in applying and transferring the skills taught in the FYE course. Some students shared the skills taught were not relevant to their needs, but rather were designed for the "ideal scenario", not one of the mature student, or student-parent. Others described a lack of "flow," where in their opinion, the skills taught in the FYE course did not apply to their other more challenging courses, or the connection between the strategy and their core content was difficult to make. Some did not recognize at the time these skills and strategies were meant to be applied outside of the FYE course; instead, this understanding developed over time. Despite the many challenges shared by students, they communicated a sense of optimism about the potential of the FYE course, sharing their wishes, hopes and dreams for how the course could improve to continue or better meet students' needs in the future. Students suggested the importance of faculty responding to their needs in the moment by meeting them where they are at. Some described this responsiveness as a means of engagement; others described it as good teaching. Despite what this looked like for students, they all emphasized its significance. Vygotsky (1978)

suggests the importance of leveraging the learners "zone of proximal development" (p. 82); beginning with students' actual level of development (where they are at) and using scaffolds and supports such as the more knowledgeable other to influence and augment learning. Some students described instruction was planned without consideration for their actual level of development, explaining the resultant disengagement.

Students also urged for a stronger connection to their subject matter or future health science careers. Additionally, students shared their desire to know the "why" behind the above-mentioned strategies, a pedagogical request grounded in constructivist approaches, affirming learning is active and knowledge as socially constructed (Dewey, 1916, 1938/1997; Piaget, 1952, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, students shared their desire to connect to and learn from upper year students. This desire to learn through the experiences of more knowledgeable affirms Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social development, whereby social learning precedes skill development.

Faculty participants shared that embedding the core content from students' challenging courses might support students in the application and transference of skills, a strategy some said, had historically improved student engagement in the classroom. One faculty shared their background in biology made modelling the academic and learning strategies with subject-matter content easier than it may have been for others, something they felt deepened the connection their students were able to make. Other faculty in this inquiry suggested the FYE learning outcomes could be modelled and practised using biology, chemistry, or mathematics content, recognizing they would need support from subject matter experts to make these curricular connections. According to faculty interviewed, student engagement increased when the FYE content was applied to their

subject matter within the context of the FYE course. Jessup-Anger (2011) found connecting the subject matter of the FYE course to students' personal lives made the class more interesting as it provided insight into the lives of their peers and increased their self-awareness. Based on students' desire to become health professionals, it is probable embedding core health science content in the FYE course may have a similar effect.

Embedding students' subject matter content might also have the potential to spark further engagement in the FYE course. Duckworth et al. (2009) found engagement meditated the relationship between grit and productivity, suggesting this deeper and more engaged learning may allow students to better harness their grittiness, which would have a ripple effect on their academic success. Additionally, the strategy of modelling academic and learning strategies alongside their challenging content might potentially offset concerns around the timing of when strategies were taught, whereby FYE faculty would be collaboratively working with the core content faculty, deepening their understanding of when strategies are required. Further, if students could troubleshoot these strategies in a supportive environment and acquire a deeper understanding of their application through supported practice, a stronger understanding would likely follow, leveraging both their zone of proximal development and the support of a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978).

As participants shared their visions for change, all were clear the quality of the experience is related to the faculty who teach the course. The findings in this inquiry suggest FYE courses are best facilitated by thoughtful and passionate faculty who inspire and view their role as mentor; they infuse grit and mindset coaching into the FYE course,

an approach that is grounded in the research as supportive and effective in helping students tap into their intellectual potential (Paunesku, et al., 2015), while enhancing the student experience, rooted in the ethics of care. The faculty in this inquiry creatively worked across the curriculum to attend to the holistic needs of their students, As Noddings (1995) suggests, "Good teachers often wish there were time in the day to co-teach unconventional topics of great importance, and they even admit that their students are not getting what they need for full personal development" (p. 676). It is likely faculty who worked to inspire, motivate, and shift student mindsets did so from a place of care, and a deeply-rooted understanding such care has the potential to create more competent learners. This is reflective of the FYE faculty participants whose roles extended beyond content expert. Retention theory (Tinto, 1993, 2012) encourages us to think beyond traditional student supports, implying we focus more on the way in which we support and scaffold learning inside the context of the post-secondary classroom, suggesting the untapped potential of the FYE faculty on the student experience.

Students stressed the importance of faculty getting to know their needs and not making assumptions, revealing the need for FYE faculty to be critical in their approaches and skilled at getting to know students through diagnostically assessing their needs. Findings revealed there is no formula for effective FYE course instruction, and the needs of first-year students should be considered as individual rather than generalized to the larger group. Discussing pedagogical and instructional techniques, faculty also emphasized the need to make learning relevant within the context of the FYE course, structuring a classroom environment where the real needs of students were addressed in a timely and relevant way. The general consensus was the FYE course curriculum and

learning experience should be responsive or emergent. Faculty explained their desire to respond to student needs in the moment, quickly changing their plans to accommodate timely emerging needs by deeply listening to students' verbal and non-verbal cues. Similarly, in order to be responsive, other faculty shared their one-on-one interactions with students often guided the content of the next weeks class, and by getting to know the real needs of their class, they were able to provide content that was thoughtful and responsive. As Dewey (1916; 1938/1997) advocates, an emergent curriculum which has the space and autonomy to be responsive to student needs, holds the greatest potential for engagement and growth.

Concluding Thoughts

In one-on-one learning strategy counselling sessions, I have witnessed the awakening of consciousness when a student's struggles are normalized, their personal life circumstances considered, and when the skills to navigate the ebb and flow of higher education are developed. This inquiry suggested meeting students' individual needs can support their progress toward establishing identity, integrity, and purpose. Yet, the participants in this inquiry revealed there is no prescriptive formula that can anticipate what these needs will be. This inquiry revealed a shift toward emergent curriculum and FYE courses based on the real needs of learners has the potential to be more meaningful, thus improving student engagement and through the process, scaffolding the development of self-identity, awareness, cooperation, and democracy. Faculty revealed their deep level of care could be augmented by institutional support, and that perhaps the same level of support they show their students, if expressed by the institution toward faculty, would be

enough to transform the FYE course, supporting faculty in visioning an FYE course that meets the real needs of college learners.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a summary of the themes that emerged during data analysis. What followed was an exploration of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and research on FYE courses, student persistence, grit, and growth mindsets to make meaning of the faculty and student experience. Interpretations and reflections were threaded throughout, revealing the complexity of the FYE course phenomenon and setting the stage for the recommendations and implications following in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX: LOOKING FORWARD

> *Students deserve one place where they can rumble with vulnerability and their hearts can exhale.*
>
> ~Brené Brown (2020, para. 2)

Chapter Four shared the faculty and student narrative, intended to represent and bring to light the voices of my participants. It culminated with a reflection on how I entered into this inquiry, and how my understanding of what I thought to be true evolved throughout my research journey, leading me to new ways of knowing, doing, and being. In Chapter Five, I shared my interpretation of the findings, using the theoretical framework that informed this inquiry and the current literature on first-year experience courses, student persistence, growth mindsets, and grit. This final chapter invites readers to reflect on what was unearthed in this inquiry; considering the implications on FYE course design, and delivery, and how the theory on student development and the findings of this inquiry converge to suggest improved instructional and pedagogical practices for not only students who are transitioning into post-secondary, but also for students at risk of not meeting their unlimited academic potential.

I begin by revisiting the original research questions that guided this inquiry; this is followed by a discussion of implications, recommendations for practice, and suggestions to guide future research. Finally, I share my own personal reflections and concluding thoughts, professing my commitment to continuing the conversation about how to best conceptualize student success, and work toward creating learning spaces that scaffold students' academic and non-academic development in tandem.

Research Questions Revisited

The overarching research question central to this inquiry explored how FYE courses are understood by faculty and students, how first-year students define success and, how FYE courses meet the needs of first-year, first-semester learners. In this section, I explore and discuss the inquiry's findings in relation to the research questions.

What do faculty understand to be the goal of FYE courses and how do these understandings influence their pedagogical and instructional approaches?

Faculty commonly shared the course functions to teach students how to learn, scaffolds their academic success, and supports their transition into and through their program of study. Faculty noted the differing levels of ability and preparedness of the twenty-first century learner, and the potential of FYE courses to level the playing field through the instruction of learning and study skills, such as goal setting, managing and dealing with procrastination, stress management, test taking skills, memory and retention strategies, reading a textbook, and emphasized as most important, time management. Faculty emphasized learning and study skill instruction can benefit students by equipping them with the technical skills required for learning even in light of learning disabilities, time away from education, the transition from secondary school, or in succeeding as an English language learner.

Faculty provided insight into their pedagogical and instructional approaches to the FYE course. Although it remains unknown if their approaches are unique to the FYE course, or rather, if this is a fixed part of their teaching identity extending into all of the classes they teach. They shared an important element of their role as an FYE faculty was to inspire and motivate students. Faculty emphasized the need to make learning relevant

in the context of the FYE course, in a classroom environment, where the needs of students were addressed in a timely and relevant way. Faculty emphasized the need for FYE course faculty to have certain skills and professional experience, such as providing one-on-one learning and counselling support, in order to arrive at a well-developed understanding of what students need, and an ability to conceptualize the student lifecycle. It was suggested predicting the timeliness of student pain points, and an in-depth understanding of the resources available to students on campus were important skills for FYE faculty.

How do first-year college students define success? How, and to what extent, does participation in a first-year experience (FYE) course influence students' self-defined notion of success?

Students described their experiences in the success course along a continuum of engagement versus disengagement, detailing both positive and negative experiences. To some students, the FYE course was a valuable part of their first-year experience, for others, it was not. Students' experiences in the FYE course varied based on stage of life, and their prior experience with learning. For example, the mature students in this inquiry identified the course was of low importance, suggesting they had already developed the skills taught in the work world, or they could be acquired outside of a credit-bearing course, such as through the use of student success services. Time management was the most frequently noted academic skills required for success, and students also acknowledged its importance in their future careers. In addition to time management, participants shared other learning strategies they acquired and felt supported their academic success, including preparing for and participating in-class, goal setting,

learning styles, groupwork, oral presentations, studying, research, and reading comprehension. Students described the nuanced and hidden behaviours acquired (such as developing confidence, cultivating relationships with professors, learning the importance of attending class, and working independently, etc.,) as shifting their confidence and mindset, better positioning them for academic success.

Are students able to transfer the skills they learn in their success course to their other courses?

Students shed light on their ability to transfer the skills learned in the FYE course to their other more challenging courses. Students shared they were unable to make the connections between the skills and strategies taught in the FYE course and their application to their other more challenging courses. Students shared the importance of being able to apply the academic and learning skills learned, suggesting it was an expectation they may have had from the course. Although for some, this connection developed over time, they stated they would have been more likely to enact the strategies and skills if they saw their connection to future academic careers and professional identities.

As shared throughout this study, students described feeling engaged when they saw the connection between the skills, strategies, and mindsets taught in the FYE course and their future area of study or career. For example, one participant shared an assignment in another course, where they interviewed an industry professional, highlighting how meaningful it was. Another student shared they would have loved to learn the science behind learning, explaining that as a health-science student, that would

have added to their overall understanding of the human body, a topic of interest and engagement.

How might student affairs professionals scaffold faculty in the process of teaching from a lens of student success, informed by the lived experiences and goals of students?

Based on student recounts of the unique role faculty play in the FYE course, combined with the faculty views, faculty development and support matters. Faculty clearly articulated the need to be supported in their teaching, specifically in relation to the unique needs of first year students in the FYE course. Faculty suggested the value of professional development, teaching and learning communities, and opportunities to connect with content expert faculty and other supports. Faculty shared subject matter experts tend not to be versed in the academic skills composing the core curriculum of the FYE course such as time management, reading comprehension, and other academic skills. Faculty suggested the importance of administrators as key partners in the successful enactment of the FYE course, and their potential to dedicate professional development time and support for the development of resources to improve and evolve practices.

The Conditions that Support Student Success in the First Year Experience Course

The research findings emerging from the data of this inquiry informed my understanding of the conditions supporting student success. Through the research process, I have constructed meaning and arrived at new understandings, directly related to faculty and student experiences, understandings of the FYE course, and the broader first-year student experience. This evolution in understanding has implications on how I

view and support student success, and the resultant conditions suggested to support student success in the FYE course. The conditions proposed below build on Wright et. al.'s (2015) earlier discussed notion that a sustainably built undergraduate curriculum would weave support across the entire student experience. As such, these conditions should be considered by all faculty teaching in the first year, and most importantly, the first semester.

Figure 6.1

The Conditions that Support Student Success in the First Year Experience Course

FYE Course Vignette	Resultant Conditions to Support Success
Students desire a responsive and emergent curriculum that pivots based on their needs.	1. Consider a customized, rather than one-size-fits all approach
Students care deeply about how instructional time is used and emphasized the importance of face-to-face interaction in the FYE course.	2. Make the most of student contact time
Students described the importance of social interaction and the resultant effect on learning and their overall college experience.	3. Make learning social
Students suggested their interest in health-science be leveraged to maximize their engagement.	4. Teach students the "why" behind academic skills and strategies
Students and faculty suggested student engagement increases when the FYE course feels connected to the student's academic subject matter.	5. Connect academic skill development to subject matter
Students and faculty discussed the important role of the teacher in the FYE classroom, specifically as a mentor.	6. Leverage faculty as mentors

Consider a Customized, Rather than One-Size-Fits all Approach

When I began this inquiry, I believed students' academic and social needs could be articulated in a list, and once known, the learning in an FYE course could be better designed to meet these needs. Instead, I learned what each student requires is different,

based on their prior life experiences, and a formula for student success likely does not exist. When embarking on this journey I wondered if students would possess the metacognition to be able to articulate their needs, but students' articulations of the skills required for success challenged this assumption. Students shared the many skills taught in the FYE course they thought prepared them for success. However, many extended the conversation by suggesting the skills and strategies that would have helped them achieve success, those not taught in the FYE course, revealing the needs of students are unique, perhaps as unique as the human fingerprint. Students desire a responsive and experiential curriculum meeting them where they are, pivoting based on their changing needs. As a result, a one-size fits all approach may not be as effective as a responsive student support curriculum that guides students to reflect on their strengths and develop skills to help bridge gaps in their academic skill development.

Make the Most of Student Contact Time

Participants revealed time is of the essence in the FYE course experience. Students valued face-to-face instructional time and wanted this time to be well used. Students commented on their dissatisfaction with shortened classes, suggesting the importance of maximizing student contact time to create an engaging and supportive learning environment.

Make Learning Social

Students want a course that engages them with their peers, socially and as mentors. In addition, they would like to learn from the field. Some valued the opportunity to learn in class, through social interaction, rather than independently outside of class.

The social nature of learning should be considered, especially in the first semester as students form a sense of belonging and community with the institution.

Teach Students the "Why" Behind Academic Skills and Strategies

Students shared the desire to know the "why" behind the academic skills and strategies taught in the FYE course. Students felt this would cultivate a stronger understanding of the potential of certain skills to augment their academic success, making them more likely to follow through with their use. Further, they suggested explaining the "why" might increase student engagement, particularly in relation to neuroscience and metacognition, leveraging students' interest in health science and understanding how the body and brain work. Others suggested knowing the "why" might improve their ability to apply and transfer these skills and strategies to their other classes, or to future courses in their health-science academic career.

Connect Academic Skill Development to Subject Matter

When possible, based on the suggestions of both faculty and students, the objectives of the FYE course should be connected to core content in students' subject matter area, students' more challenging core courses, or their future professions. Students suggested the timing of when academic skills and learning strategies are taught should be coordinated with the student lifecycle, ensuring skills are taught before they are needed in other more difficult courses. Faculty echoed this sentiment, layering in the challenge of coordinating the skills and strategies taught in the FYE course with students' other more challenging courses.

Leverage Faculty as Mentors

It has been my experience in the past, working with faculty across the college landscape, many college faculty are unaware of the intricacies of the student experience, and further, the needs of students to be supported in their social and academic development. The faculty interviewed described the complexity of twenty-first century learners, and all faculty described the many ways in which they support student's non-cognitive development in the FYE course. Students suggested faculty play a unique and important role in the FYE course experience. Faculty shared they viewed their role as one of inspiration, pseudo counselor and coach, a sentiment echoed by students. As such, this relationship should be leveraged where possible.

Recommendations and Implications

The following recommendations made are two-fold: those of the participants, as shared in the semi-structured interviews conducted for this research inquiry, and second, my own, based on a personal interpretation of the findings, from the lens of researcher, teacher, and student affairs professional. In the following section, I outline four recommendations that have practical applications for the administration and enactment of FYE courses and more broadly, student success initiatives: 1) define the FYE course; 2) meet students where they are at; 3) faculty support and development; and 4) a whole campus approach. These recommendations could have a number of implications for student affairs professionals, post-secondary educators teaching FYE courses, as well as those supporting students in their first semester, or who are interested in using the classroom as a space to support and augment student success. In addition, some of the findings presented in this inquiry have implications for administrators or curriculum

developers who are making decisions about the implementation or future direction of first-year experiences courses, or who are enacting curricular changes to support student success and students transition into, through, and beyond their first semester.

Define the FYE Course

It is suggested that administrative staff or curricular decision-makers ground the FYE course experience in the extant literature to clearly define the intended purpose of the course (for example, remedial, transition, academic theme, or mixed). I believe defining the courses intended purpose and function would help create a more commonly shared and unified institutional understanding of the course. The findings suggest the FYE course should not rest on the margins of students' academic experience, but rather should be seen as the core of their development and orientation to academic life. Although this could be accomplished through many different means, based on the findings of this research inquiry, it is suggested the connection between the skills, strategies, and mindsets taught in the FYE course be deepened through their connection to students' academic disciplines, often referred to as their core content. Defining the course as an academic theme could be the start to accomplishing this goal. Embedded within this recommendation is the need for institutional decision-makers and administrative staff to better understand the FYE experience, valuing its role in the broader program.

Based on these findings, it is recommended first-year experience course instructors consider teaching and modelling learning strategies using the subject matter content from students' program or major area of study. One faculty shared their experience using concepts from students more challenging courses as the foundation

upon which learning strategies were explored, noting increased student engagement followed. They explained in the context of the FYE course, students were provided an opportunity to apply the learning strategies and academic skills while learning, reviewing, and acquiring an understanding of their core course content. This faculty noted this was made possible by a reciprocal relationship with a core content course instructor, and further, was supported by their own subject matter expertise in the content. For example, in a preparatory science program, it would be recommended a reading comprehension strategy be taught in a way that allowed students to see its application to their academic reading. A reading strategy could be modelled using an excerpt from their biology textbook. This could be followed by an opportunity for students to practice, rehearse, and troubleshoot this strategy in class, where they had access to their faculty and more knowledgeable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Meet the Unique Needs of Learners

Students shared the importance of responsive teaching and learning. Students clearly stated their desire for a curriculum striving to meet them where they are at; one designed around their individually unique needs, and pivoting as needs evolved based on the demands of the semester. Specifically, mature learners and English language learners shared examples from when they had benefited from responsive or student-centred pedagogy. Students who had fewer positive experiences in the FYE course suggested a more individualized approach would have enriched their experience. Based on these findings, it is suggested faculty consider adopting more responsive pedagogical approaches allowing for the diagnostic assessment of student needs, moving toward an instructional and curricular approach responsive to individual student needs. Meeting

students where they are at developmentally leverages their proximal zone of development, readying them to actively partake in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Faculty suggested responsiveness also requires being in tune to the verbal and non-verbal cues expressed in the classroom, a task likely made easier by smaller class sizes. Faculty suggested smaller class sizes and I recommend when possible, smaller class sizes for FYE courses be considered. Further, as suggested by one faculty, the FYE course as a "homeroom" could be explored, where smaller class sizes would allow for a more intimate and supportive learning environment for students, scaffolding their transition into post-secondary. This recommendation mirrors the model studied by Huff and Burek (2016) where FYE course instructors meet individually to advise students. It would also respond to faculty's desire to have more contact time with students.

Faculty Support and Development

This inquiry shed light on the unique skill set required by FYE faculty. Institutions with FYE courses, including those who are in the process of implementing FYE courses, and those who embed FYE learning outcomes and skills in other courses require faculty who possess the ability to support academic skill development and social integration in tandem. When these skills do not exist, institutions must be willing to invest in the resources and supports to properly build faculty's capacity to teach from a lens of student success. For example, in this inquiry faculty shared the skill set required to teach the learning and academic skills required within the FYE course. They suggested this skill was cultivated through traditional teacher training (Bachelor or Master's in education), or in their student success role in higher education (as a learning strategist or in educational counselling). It was suggested many subject matter experts teaching at the

college level may not have experience or training in teaching, learning, or student success. A broader implication of this work might require institutions to examine how faculty capacity is being built, or, how experts in teaching, learning, and student success might be leaned on to teach in the first-semester to scaffold students development of the learning and academic skills required for success, as well as support their students social development. Supporting the development of FYE faculty through mentorship, professional development, or other training has been cited as an important component of successful FYE courses (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2004; Fink, 2013; Gardner, 1980; Huff & Burek, 2016; Jessup-Anger, 2011; Litteral & Taylor, 2015).

This work can extend beyond building the capacity of FYE faculty to support students' social and academic development, to supporting all faculty in teaching from the lens of student success. It is my hope administrators, faculty developers, student affairs staff, and faculty see this as a call to action, and together we can move toward seeing first-year experience learning outcomes need not rest just within an FYE course, but with all professionals to see space for these outcomes within their own sphere of influence on the student experience. With this in mind, student affairs professionals should be offered opportunities to bring students' experiences to light, alongside the strategies and supports proven effective in mitigating the impact of transitional and learning challenges. Faculty and student affairs professionals should, where possible, work together to harness what is known about the student experience, to reinvent pedagogical and instructional strategies that can optimize the student experience.

Investing in the professional development of FYE faculty should be considered for its ripple effect, directly affecting the first-year student experience. Faculty clearly

stated their desire for improved institutional support and the introduction of professional development, specifically related to the FYE course. Participants referenced the value of a teaching and learning community, where collaborative conversation, the exchanging of ideas, and sharing of curricular resources could support the evolution of their teaching practice. It is therefore recommended institutions with FYE courses consider forming teaching and learning communities, and where possible, these communities include student affairs professionals. Student affairs professionals could contribute their knowledge on the student lifecycle, common pain-points, and with expertise in learning how to learn, supporting faculty in better understanding the academic skills and strategies required for success. Where possible, students should be present in teaching and learning communities to help faculty better understand and connect with the student experience.

One of the challenges mentioned was the heavy reliance on part-time faculty, who are often not allotted time for professional development. In prioritizing the FYE course, resources should be invested in the training, development, and support of these faculty, despite their employment status. Further, it was suggested administrative decision-makers consider prioritizing the hiring and onboarding of FYE faculty, rather than allowing this to be an afterthought, or "filler" course. The important role FYE faculty play in the student experience and resultant student success outcomes further affirms this. These recommendations could be extended to all faculty who teach in the first year, to begin to build an ecosystem of student success.

Supporting Student Success Beyond the FYE Course: A Whole Campus Approach

There exists the potential for what has been unearthed to be applied to courses beyond the FYE course. As Tinto (2006-2007) suggested in Chapter Two, the first year is

"critical" and, "returns to institutional investment in student retention and learning are likely the greatest" (p. 8). Based on the findings of this inquiry, I would like to extend Levitz and Noel's (1989) claim that FYE courses should be taught by the best faculty, and also suggest all first-year courses should be taught by the best faculty. Just as important as the best and most skilled faculty teaching in the first year, is their approach to supporting and scaffolding student development.

The extant literature shared in Chapter Two revealed the potential of embedding learning and academic skills alongside course curriculum. In many ways this represented what would also be considered the academic themed or mixed FYE course. This research, along with the findings of this inquiry, suggest every course offers the potential to house first-year experience outcomes, where learning how to learn can be modelled alongside the course content, and where students' social integration can be encouraged and supported. In essence, this implication is one of vast expansiveness, whereby supporting students' academic and social development can be seen as the responsibility of each and every faculty member within the higher education community. Further, institutions should designate and prioritize space such as flexible classroom spaces where available (over lecture halls and fixed rows of seats), for first-year courses, allowing for impromptu group work and intimate learning experiences, a feature recognized and valued by the participants interviewed in this inquiry.

As shown in the literature, the first semester holds the greatest potential to influence student persistence (Tinto, 2012), therefore, an emphasis on the first semester is encouraged. Faculty working collectively to support students in their process of becoming through supporting their academic and social integration, would extend the

work of student services beyond the margins of the student experience (Tinto, 2012), creating an ecosystem of student success. Grayson et al. (2019) suggest many "hypothetical" (p. 29) remedies to supporting student success, one of which proposes universities themselves deal with the deficiency through a compulsory first-year credit course, however they caution "the skills learned would need reinforcing through assignments and grading schemes in other courses during first year and beyond" (p. 29), or else, they caution they would simply "atrophy" (p. 29). As such, all courses in the first year should be seen as responsible for scaffolding and supporting students in their journey toward gaining the skills and mindsets required for success in higher education.

Future Research

The FYE course takes many different forms at colleges and universities across the province, yet these courses appear to be developed and enacted in isolation. Further, studies on the student and faculty experience remain relatively absent from the practice literature. Additionally, in the Ontario postsecondary landscape, studies on FYE course efficacy are limited. Based on the findings from this inquiry, five key areas of further research are identified: Ontario FYE courses; transferability; faculty capacity; longitudinal studies; and action-oriented research.

Explore the Goals, Aims, and Understandings of FYE Courses in Ontario

As revealed in this inquiry, understandings of the FYE course, even within one medium sized college, are mixed; further exploration is needed to understand the various functions and roles of FYE courses in various post-secondary institutions. For each student, the course had its own purpose and perceived value. Even for faculty participants in this inquiry, where understandings were more commonly shared, variance still existed.

Some participants shared their feelings the FYE course is devalued or seen as unimportant by administrators, a perspective that should also be explored further. Future research projects should compare and contrast the learning outcomes and course content of FYE courses across the province, to reveal the commonalities and differences existing across the landscape. Once known, faculty developers, student affairs staff and faculty could collaborate and share resources to evolve curricular approaches supporting the first-year experience. Further research into the voiced needs of students would also be useful to guide curricular decisions. This might reveal the unique functions the FYE course takes on, such as was revealed in this inquiry, supporting English language learners.

Research the Transferability of Skills Acquired in an FYE Course

This inquiry uncovered students' struggle to transfer the skills learned in the FYE course to their other more challenging courses. Over time, a student's ability to apply learning strategies and the transferability of these skills may become a more contemporary measure of FYE course efficacy. There would be great value in research examining more closely the phenomena of transferability in direct relation to different pedagogical techniques. For example, participants in this inquiry suggested modelling the strategies alongside students' more challenging course content, supported transferability. This should be explored further to guide teaching and learning best practices.

Research How to Build Faculty Capacity to Teach from a Lens of Student Success

Future research should also explore the phenomenon of FYE faculty capacity, development, and support to uncover the best ways to support faculty in understanding the student experience, and teach from a lens of student success. In this inquiry it was

suggested FYE faculty require a unique skill set, acquired through teacher education or student support experience. It is suggested research explore the relationship between faculty skills and experience and the student FYE course experience. I wonder if faculty with formal teacher training (K-12) employ a more humanistic approach. As described in Chapter Two, humanistic, constructivist, and student developmental theories provide insight into the importance of supporting students' affective domain as they journey along their quest of self-development. Further research could reveal best practices for supporting faculty to adopt holistic teaching practices that support students' affective development in the classroom, and as a result, their success in post-secondary. I would also recommend future research explore how making meaning out of student development and critical theory might influence pedagogical and curricular approaches to supporting student success for faculty that are not trained or certified teachers.

Additionally, the role student affairs staff could play, or are playing in FYE course delivery should be examined. There would be great value in examining the potential of how this dyadic relationship could build capacity of faculty to teach from a lens of student success, and of student affairs staff to better understand the classroom experience. Research examining the ways in which faculty can be supported to understand and make meaning of the student lifecycle, academic and social integration, along with the tools, skills, and mindsets supporting flourishing should be examined. Woven throughout these future research suggestions is the recommendation students should be consulted within the classroom, and particularly within the FYE course to support faculty in teaching in a way that is responsive of students' lived or actual needs.

Conduct Longitudinal Research

Throughout this inquiry, I often thought of my participants' journey through and beyond higher education. A few of the research participants visited me on campus to share their experiences, celebrate their accomplishments, or updated me on thoughts they have had since our interview. True to Tinto's (2012) assertion the FYE course plants seeds that take time to mature, time has allowed some of these experiences to bring new understandings of the importance and value of the FYE course to the forefront. As shared in Chapter Two, few studies have longitudinally followed students across their academic program to explore the ways in which the skills learned in the FYE course may or may not have contributed to the outcome of completion or attrition (Padgett et al., 2013). Longitudinal research on the FYE course might provide insight into the ways in which students apply and transfer the skills and mindsets acquired in the FYE course, and their impact on students' long-term academic success and overall student experience. Research tracing students along their journey would also capture the experience of students who did not meet their goals, withdrew, or transferred programs. My anecdotal conversations with participants since the inquiry have revealed hindsight provides new understanding of the value of the FYE course, which could be captured in a study spanning students' educational careers.

Create Space for Action-Oriented Research

It is my hope future research will create space for faculty, as participants, to construct knowledge and meaning, evolving teaching practices to support student success. The research literature tends to reinforce the portrayal of practitioners as doers, those who are competent enough to be involved in improving practice, rather than

thinkers (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Honouring the practitioner as a "brilliant knower," and conducting research from the standpoint of the practitioner (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p. 2) has the opportunity to engage faculty in the act of making meaning and evolving pedagogical and instructional approaches. Proponents of action research commonly agree the principle concern of participants is changing practices in the "here and now," acknowledging more general and abstract understandings may be slower to change (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). It is my belief engaging faculty in the reflexive spiral of thinking, reflecting, planning, and doing would ultimately benefit students, even if through seemingly small change. Action research would urge movement beyond the binary divide separating knowledge generation (theory and research) from practice to a place where theory and practice contribute to the development of praxis. Faculty, particularly those teaching in the first-semester of the first-year, should be further engaged in professional development or action orientated research to make meaning of the first-year experience, furthering their ability to teach from the lens of student success.

Complexities and Subjectivities

The findings are limited by the size and scope of the research inquiry, which was intended as a case study. These findings do not represent the views and experiences of students who have experienced an FYE course outside of the institution studied. As is commonly understood in student affairs, student experiences vary from cohort to cohort, and evolve over time. This research inquiry offers a glimpse into the student and faculty experience, representing a snap-shot in time. The student experience is influenced by an evolving and constantly changing sphere of influence, known as life outside of the

classroom. The understandings provide insight allowing readers to begin thinking about how students can be better supported in FYE courses, and beyond, and how the learning outcomes of an FYE course might be taken up in other first year courses. It is my hope these findings shed light on the FYE course experience, providing a springboard through which teaching, learning, and student supports might be re-visioned.

Personal Reflections and Concluding Thoughts

As a professional in the field of student affairs, I set out on this inquiry driven by the hope and opportunity to improve the student experience. The pressure of doing research is real, and something I did not anticipate at the start of this journey. I expected to uncover new understandings, draw conclusions, and make inferences based on my findings, but what I did not expect was to finish with more questions than answers; I am left wondering if this is the intended purpose of doctoral studies. Through the process, I have become more comfortable living in a state of not knowing, and I have learned to see my work as an arena, where through purposeful reflection and thoughtful questioning, my practice and work have become problem-posing and action-oriented (Freire, 1970; 1993, Herr & Anderson, 2015). As an emerging researcher, standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2004) invited me to lean into my positionality as a woman (Smith, 2005) and explore how to include my voice and other traditionally marginalized voices in the inquiry process. In many ways, my doctoral journey, and the room and support I had to explore and grow, recommitted me to feminism and to an approach with students "where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction" (hooks, 2000, p. x).

When I started this journey, I felt most connected to the student experience; in fact, my work as a practitioner had always revolved around probing students for

information to gain insight into their strengths, challenges, obstacles, and successes. I have come to understand I was actually most curious about how faculty understood students' needs, and their pedagogical and instructional approaches to the FYE course, in relation to the storied lives students live. I have been asked why I interviewed faculty first when I was most interested in bringing voice to students, but I now wonder if it was because I assumed faculty were teaching the course a particular way based on the experiences I had had with students; what I discovered, however, was my assumption was wrong: faculty were, in fact, teaching it another way. Revealed in the findings and woven throughout the discussion has been this question: How do you explain the dissonance between faculty pedagogical approaches and the student experience in the course? While this dissonance should be the springboard for future exploratory and action-based research, I feel it appropriate to offer my insights and reflections here, as my closing words.

The faculty interviewed in this inquiry arrived with an array of educational, professional, and lived experiences; each individual interviewed struck me with their thoughtful, purposeful, and intentional approach to the FYE course. Although participants shared the course was, in their opinion, devalued or deemed less important by administrators and by some other faculty, they each shared their thoughtful pedagogical approaches and how they worked to make learning meaningful, relevant, and transferable for students. The dissonance appeared when students described some aspects of the course as meaningful, while others thought of it as irrelevant or difficult to transfer.

This inquiry has led me to better understand there is no magic formula to good teaching, or there is no one size fits all FYE course. It has served as a reminder the

classroom is a living environment, one that changes moment to moment based on the lived experiences and unique needs of the students who fill its seats. In my opinion, this explains why no perfect solution emerged. Prewritten curricula, textbooks, and well-intentioned course designs cannot anticipate the actual needs of students. The best course of action is therefore, to honour teachers' request for more support, more contact time, and the enactment of teaching and learning communities, whereby meaning can be made, and thoughtful responsive teaching can be explored in real-time, alongside the ebb and flow of students' needs.

As my supervisor insightfully shared, "the data will take you where you need to go" (Parr, personal communication); I suspect the same will be true for the next steps of this inquiry. Perhaps part of the solution to dissolving the dissonance between faculty intentions and the student experience lies in helping and supporting both faculty and students to be more connected to the present experience. I wonder if there may be a disconnect when faculty attempt to predict what students need based on past experiences, and when students arrive with expectations based on their anticipations of the future. What learning might unfold if the teaching-learning experience was met in the present, with care and awareness, all-the-while suspending judgment?

As I conclude this research inquiry, I am hopeful readers may share with me a similar respect and appreciation for what was unearthed in this inquiry: meeting first-year students' needs is complex, and in the context of the FYE course, even more so. FYE faculty are working hard to make learning significant, revealing perhaps an untapped passionate potential. Social worker and university professor Brené Brown (2018) defines a leader, "… as anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and

processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential" (p. 4). As I arrive at the end of this inquiry, I feel deeply pulled to continue down this path, and feel this dissertation marks the beginning of my path as a researcher. This journey has shown me change can be inspired organically throughout the research process, and the knowledge unearthed during research presents researchers an opportunity to lead. As I write my final words here, I am optimistic like the student participants in this inquiry, I have acquired the skills required to do great things. With a newfound understanding of the power of grit and mindset, I remain determined to stay with my commitment to improve the student experience, not finishing my journey by completing this research inquiry. Like the gritty individual, I believe this marks the beginning, for:

> [T]here are no shortcuts to excellence. Developing real expertise, figuring out really hard problems, it all takes time— longer than most people imagine… Grit is about working on something you care about so much that you're willing to stay loyal to it… it's doing what you love, but not just falling in love— staying in love. (Duckworth, 2016, p. 54)

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APPENDIX 1

Letter of Information and Consent

Research Title: Conceptualizing and Planning for Post-Secondary Success: Meeting the Needs of College Learners in a First-Year Experience Course

Principal Investigator: Sarah Hunter
Sarah is a Writing Centre Technologist and part-time faculty member at [redacted] and a PhD Candidate, student researcher at Nipissing University.

What is the purpose of the study? Who is being asked to participate?
First-year experience courses have been designed and implemented at post-secondary institutions across North-America in hopes of supporting student learning and improving student outcomes. This study aims to acquire new insights and understandings about how the course, [redacted] experienced and understood from various perspectives including students, faculty, and administrators. Existing documentation such as written curriculum, syllabi, and course outlines will be analyzed.

If you are a faculty member, you may choose to also participate in the second phase of this study. The second phase will target faculty member who are teaching FYE courses. They will be invited to engage in a participatory action project to make meaning of the student experience in the FYE course as well as to explore principles and understandings of holistic student development in relation to their pedagogical and instructional approaches.

What am I being asked to do?
I am asking for your participation in the first phase of this study, although if you are teaching a FYE course you may also choose to participate in phase two. This first phase consists of an individual conversational interview lasting no longer than 40-60 minutes depending on your level of comfort at a mutually agreed upon time and location. You may also be asked to respond or correspond with me throughout the research process to ensure the integrity of your data as I strive to represent the envisioned reality of each research participant. This follow-up may take between 20-30 minutes. If you agree to participate as a staff member, faculty or administrator, you will be offering your insight into how the first-year experience course is understood and perceived. Your interview will be audio-taped (with your consent as a participant) to ensure accurate transcription of responses.

What are the benefits of participating?
The potential benefits of participating in this study include an opportunity to share and reflect on your understanding of first year experience courses, your professional practices, and/or your experiences as a teacher. Your contribution will contribute to educational research that informs first year experiences such as courses, post-secondary orientation, transition and academic support services and programs.

What are the risks of participating?
Minimal risk is anticipated. The most significant risk may be that the sharing of personal experiences may cause discord within the larger institution or within working relationships. You will only be encouraged to share details that you feel comfortable sharing, and no pressure will be applied to attain information. This study is non-evaluative and other college personnel will not know the identities of

those who agree to participate in this research project, unless you decide to share. If any psychological distress occurs, you will be assisted in accessing counselling supports (see where can I access support?). You may also incur expenses outside of your normal routine such as parking costs, travel and the value of your time.

Where can I access support?
If there are psychological issues that arise in the interviews or discussions, you can access telephone or in-person support through counselling services at [redacted] or by visiting [redacted]. If you are a post-secondary student in Ontario you can access Good2Talk, a free, confidential helpline providing professional counseling and referrals to services. Good2Talk is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week by calling 1-866-925-5454. Alternatively, you may connect with the Mental Health Helpline for information about mental health services in Ontario by calling 1-866-531-2600.

Will I be compensated?
You will not be compensated for your participation in this research study.

Do I have to participate?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you consent to participate, you can withdraw at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) that you find objectionable or which make you feel uncomfortable. To withdraw at anytime you can email, call or speak in person to the student researcher or contact the Georgian College Research Ethics Board or the Nipissing University Research Ethics Board.

What about anonymity and confidentiality?
The information you provide is considered to be confidential. I will ask you to choose a pseudonym that will be used to obscure your identity; all identifying information will be removed. Due to the nature of this research, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the researcher and the faculty supervisor of this study.

What will you do with my data?
Electronic data, including survey data and electronic documents, will be stored in a confidential folder on the researcher's password protected computer. Hard copy documents (e.g., the researcher's field journal) will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office and all information will be stored for a period of seven years following completion of the study. At that time, all the data will be burned.

Will I have access to the results?
The first phase findings will be published in the final dissertation. They will also be used to inform the teaching and learning community involved in the second phase of this study.
The researcher's findings and their experience with the teaching and learning community will be reported in the researcher's doctoral dissertation, may be published in professional journals, and/or presented during research conferences for the educational community. Upon request, participants will have access to these documents.

Will my data be used for any other purposes?
Data collected during this research will not be used for any other purposes other than as outlined above.

If you would like additional information about participation in the study, please contact:

Researcher: Sarah Hunter, [redacted]
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michelann Parr, [redacted]

Confirmation and Consent

I _____, voluntarily agree to participate in the research inquiry *Conceptualizing and Planning for Post-Secondary Success: Meeting the Needs of College Learners in a First-Year Experience Course* being conducted by Sarah Hunter, Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University. I understand that she will be guided by her Supervisor Dr. Michelann Parr. I have been briefed on the purpose of this study, my involvement and responsibilities. As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do, and that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw from this project at any time, without penalty or giving a reason. I understand that steps are being taken to protect me. I can ask to have all my information in all formats removed from the research. I also agree to the use of my information as described above. I give permission for my interviews/conversations to be recorded and transcribed. The recordings will be used only to ensure the correct transcription of the interviews and will be heard only by Sarah Hunter who is both an employee of Georgian College and student researcher. The researcher agrees to check in with me throughout the data collection, interpretation, and analysis to determine its accuracy.

I have read this Consent Form and have had any questions, concerns or complaints answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided a copy of this letter.

Participant signature:_____

Name:_____

Date:_____

Researcher signature:_____

Name:_____

Date:_____
Please sign both copies and keep one for your own records.

APPENDIX 2

Letter of Information and Consent

Research Title: Conceptualizing and Planning for Post-Secondary Success: Meeting the Needs of College Learners in a First-Year Experience Course

Principal Investigator: Sarah Hunter

Sarah is a Writing Centre Technologist and part-time faculty member at [redacted] and a PhD Candidate, student researcher at Nipissing University.

What is the purpose of the study? Who is being asked to participate?
First-year experience courses have been designed and implemented at post-secondary institutions across North-America in hopes of supporting student learning and improving student outcomes. This study aims to acquire new insights and understandings about how the course [redacted] is experienced and understood from various perspectives including students, faculty, and administrators. Existing documentation such as written curriculum, syllabi, and course outlines will be analyzed.

What am I being asked to do?
I am asking for your participation in the first phase of this study, consisting of an individual conversational interview lasting no longer than 40-60 minutes depending on your level of comfort at a mutually agreed upon time and location. You may also be asked to respond or correspond with me throughout the research process to ensure the integrity of your data as I strive to represent the envisioned reality of each research participant. This follow-up may take between 20-30 minutes. If you agree to participate as a student, you will be sharing insight into your experience in a first-year experience course. Your interview will be audio-taped (with your consent as a participant) to ensure accurate transcription of responses.

What are the benefits of participating?
The potential benefits of participating in this study include an opportunity to share and reflect on your understanding of first year experience courses, and your experiences as a student. Your contribution will contribute to educational research that informs first year experiences such as courses, post-secondary orientation, transition and academic support services and programs.

What are the risks of participating?
Minimal risk is anticipated. The most significant risk may be that the sharing of personal experiences may cause discord within the larger institution or within working relationships. You will only be encouraged to share details that you feel comfortable sharing, and no pressure will be applied to attain information. This study is non-evaluative and other college personnel will not know the identities of those who agree to participate in this research project, unless you decide to share. If any psychological distress occurs, you will be assisted in accessing counselling supports (see where can I access support?).

Where can I access support?
If there are psychological issues that arise in the interviews or discussions, you can access telephone or in-person support through counselling services at [redacted] or by visiting [redacted]. If you are a post-secondary student in Ontario you can access Good2Talk, a free, confidential helpline providing professional counseling and

referrals to services. Good2Talk is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week by calling 1-866-925-5454. Alternatively, you may connect with the Mental Health Helpline for information about mental health services in Ontario by calling 1-866-531-2600.

Will I be compensated?
You will be compensated in the form of a $15 coffee gift card for your participation in this research study. This is intended to help with the costs associated with parking on campus, travel to campus and the value of your time. If you withdraw from the study and/or choose to end the interview at anytime you will still receive this compensation.

Do I have to participate?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you consent to participate, you can withdraw at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) that you find objectionable or which make you feel uncomfortable. To withdraw at anytime you can email, call or speak in person to the student researcher or contact the Georgian College Research Ethics Board or the Nipissing University Research Ethics Board.

What about anonymity and confidentiality?
The information you provide is considered to be confidential. I will ask you to choose a pseudonym that will be used to obscure your identity; all identifying information will be removed. Due to the nature of this research, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the researcher and the faculty supervisor of this study.

What will you do with my data?
Electronic data, including survey data and electronic documents, will be stored in a confidential folder on the researcher's password protected computer. Hard copy documents (e.g., the researcher's field journal) will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office and all information will be stored for a period of seven years following completion of the study. At that time, all the data will be burned.

Will I have access to the results?
As a student you will have access to the published dissertation or can request a copy from the researcher.

Will my data be used for any other purposes?
Data collected during this research will not be used for any other purposes other than as outlined above.

If you would like additional information about participation in the study, please contact:

Researcher: Sarah Hunter, [redacted]
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michelann Parr, [redacted]

Confirmation and Consent

I _____, voluntarily agree to participate in the research inquiry *Conceptualizing and Planning for Post-Secondary Success: Meeting the Needs of College Learners in a First-Year Experience Course* being conducted by Sarah Hunter, Schulich School of Education at Nipissing

University. I understand that she will be guided by her Supervisor Dr. Michelann Parr. I have been briefed on the purpose of this study, my involvement and responsibilities. As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do, and that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw from this project at any time, without penalty or giving a reason. I understand that steps are being taken to protect me. I can ask to have all my information in all formats removed from the research. I also agree to the use of my information as described above. I give permission for my interviews/conversations to be recorded and transcribed. The recordings will be used only to ensure the correct transcription of the interviews and will be heard only by Sarah Hunter who is both an employee of Georgian College and student researcher. The researcher agrees to check in with me throughout the data collection, interpretation, and analysis to determine its accuracy.

I have read this Consent Form and have had any questions, concerns or complaints answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided a copy of this letter.

Participant signature:_____

Name:_____

Date:_____

Researcher signature:_____

Name:_____

Date:_____

Please sign both copies and keep one for your own records.

APPENDIX 3

Course Description	Students explore and develop skills essential to personal, academic and professional success in science and health science careers in today's workforce. The importance of personal and professional awareness is examined. Students are provided with a variety of study skills, including scientific and medical terminology, designed to support academic success and build confidence. Contemporary issues and trends and their impact on health care are considered as students explore medical career options and interprofessional practice. Additional opportunities are provided for students to build skills associated with diversity and cultural competencies, including indigenous content, in the context of health care in Canada today.
Course Content	• Scientific and medical terminology • Study skills • Success strategies • Trends in health care including interprofessional care • Career options in health care • Cultural competencies • Indigenous health and healing
Learning Outcomes	1. develop realistic and appropriate short term and long term goals to facilitate learning and success; 2. apply study skills and success strategies; 3. describe theories and practice skills related to motivation and learning; 4. explain the philosophical principles that are the foundation of the Canadian health care system; 5. discuss trends affecting health care practices in Ontario and Canada; 6. describe the roles and responsibilities of different health care professionals; 7. communicate in appropriate ways that support the achievement of goals in culturally diverse contexts; 8. discuss varied approaches to health care practiced within Canada.