

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The present study was designed to examine the high school experiences of college students enrolled in remedial classes. These experiences are examined as they relate to four factors played by each of the following in preparing high school students for college: high school teachers, high school guidance counselors, parents and students themselves.

This review begins by examining literature related to the role of high school teachers in preparing students for college study. Both factors that lead to successful transitions to college and factors that constrain a successful transition are explored. The second section examines the literature on the role high school guidance counselors play in preparing high school students for college. The involvement of parents in the student's transition from high school to college is examined next. Finally, research that focuses on the impact students' self-efficacy have on their college preparedness is reviewed.

The Role of High School Teachers

In 1983, the Nation at Risk report (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) released by the United States Department of Education raised concerns about the curriculum and standards to which students were held in public schools in the United States. One of the issues raised in this report, was with the preparation of high school graduates for post secondary education. In response to the report, many states began to analyze their high school curricular requirements. Studies revealed that students who completed a college preparatory course of study are not always exempt from college remediation courses. (Florida State House of Representatives, 1996; Hamilton, 1992; Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 1993; State Higher Education Executive Officers and Education Commission of the States, 1995).

College preparation courses offered in high school typically are not coordinated with the requirements for admission into credited college courses. Many high school college preparation courses do not focus on the specific skills required to prepare students for the transition from the high school curriculum to a college course of study (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore, 1997).

Some studies have suggested that pedagogical styles of high school teachers can affect preparedness of students for college. Less effective high school teachers provide curricular-centered instruction and teach to the test rather than motivating students to become life long learners (Kagan, 1993). Effective teachers are those who individualize instruction, interact with students, and keep students task-oriented (Waxman & Huang, 1997).

In many cases, the teacher's effectiveness is measured by the students' performance on required tests. As a result, Kagan (1993) argues, the pedagogical strategy implemented in the classroom is limited to a recall of what was taught in the classroom and does not foster teacher-student interactions.

Kagan's (1993) conclusions are based on her assumption about different types of classroom environments that teachers create. The classroom environment is a reflection of the teacher's strategies in the classroom. In a study by Teel, Debruin-Parecki & Covington (1998) three classroom environments that enhanced learning for students were investigated. The first was a classroom environment where performance was stressed over mastery. Increasing the frequency of classroom discussions allowed students more opportunities to be engaged in the classroom sessions. The second environment that demonstrated increased student enthusiasm were classrooms that recognized the diverse strengths, talents, creative expression and creative thinking skills of the students. The final classroom environment that enhanced student performance was one that encouraged students to participate in decisions relative to the curriculum. Students who were given a choice of books, their own projects and their own questions to answer took their classroom assignments more seriously.

Teaching styles are related to the preparation of students. Kagan's (1993) investigation of teaching styles found the inductive method of instruction was more effective than the information-giving lecture method of instruction.

Teaching to the mandated curriculum and use of standard testing targets low-level achievement. The information-giving model of teaching reinforces an authoritarian, grade-oriented notion of learning. The student-centered classroom, discovery learning and compacted learning strategies that promote problem solving and higher-level thinking skills are a distinct contrast to the information-giving model presented in high school classes. The student-centered model promotes high-level thinking skills and is sensitive to the abilities and idiosyncrasies of each student (Kagan, 1993).

These models avoid the trap of teaching to the test and the grade-oriented notion of learning. As high school classroom teachers move away from content distribution to skill development, student performance improves (Kagan 1993; Teel, et al. 1998).

Other scholars have suggested that the evaluation method used by high school teachers influences student performance. Student proficiency cannot be evaluated on an annual basis if there is an expectation that the student's deficiencies can be corrected during that school year. High school graduates entering college with academic skill deficits need early and ongoing interventions in the high school classroom to reduce the perpetual reinforcement of skill deficiencies. Frequent evaluations of a student's performance will provide opportunities for teachers to address the deficiencies of the student. (Basic Skills Assessment Program, 1991).

The most effective teaching methods are those in which the teacher engages the student in the learning process. The student's learning curve is increased when there is an interactive relationship between the student and the teacher. By engaging the student in the learning process, the expectations of the student held by the teacher remain higher. Interaction between students and teachers assists teachers in recognizing the students' educational strengths and weaknesses (Foy, 1994).

While teaching style is one factor that enhances students preparation for college level work, a second factor is the relationship between the high school curriculum and the college curriculum. Higher education and high schools traditionally have maintained separate educational goals. Bandy (1985) argued that a lack of clearly stated academic requisites by colleges and universities is one reason why a significant number of incoming freshman are required to take remedial courses. For example, many state legislators believe that a collaborative effort between K-12 schools and higher education is needed. In order to develop strategies to improve student performance, a dialogue between the two levels of education is needed. The State Higher Education Executive Officers and Education Commission of the States (1995) suggest that a dialogue might result in the development of a seamless curriculum. The K-16 alliance concept, which coordinates the elementary, middle school and high school curriculum with a four year college education, has gained momentum as states strive to hold pre-college programs educationally accountable and to prepare students for college level work. Creating a seamless transition from elementary through secondary to higher education would allow educators at all levels to establish goals that enhance the preparation of the college bound student (Fenske, et al. 1997; State Higher Education Executive Officers and Education Commission of the States, 1995).

To accomplish a seamless transition, educators have developed strategies. One such strategy involves feedback from one educational system to the other. Because of the significant numbers of high school graduates who require remediation upon entering college, colleges have been encouraged to report back to high schools on how well their graduates are prepared to handle college level work (Gaines & Musick, 1988). Feedback to high schools might invite further sharing of information between high school teachers and college professors.

Another strategy to improve high school relations with colleges focuses on identifying shared objectives for learning. The high school teacher's effectiveness in the classroom should be related to the post- secondary goals of the student. It is not merely the completion of a course or class that assures the acquisition of skills needed for college preparation. The high school teacher's and the college professor's classroom objectives must be synchronized to adequately prepare the student (Kagan, 1993).

Similar findings were reported in a study of high school graduates from Florida's Leon County (Southard & Collier, 1997). Although students were taking higher-level courses and earning better grades than in the past, the percentage of students needing remediation in mathematics had not decreased.

The issue of teachers' influence on student preparedness has also been examined by the ethnicity of high school students. England (1994) found that African-American students need more remediation than non-minority and Hispanic students. National data revealed that minority students are twice as likely as non-minority students to be low achievers. African-American and Hispanic children are twice as likely as White children to be low achievers. The reading, writing and mathematic skills, as reported from an analysis of sequential years of Stanford Achievement Test results, of these students are more deficient compared to White students (Stringfield, 1997).