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# Sense-Making and the Community College Student

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# Sense-Making and the Community College Student

Susan Wengler, MBA, MLIS

## Purpose

A qualitative pilot study is underway at Queensborough Community College - The City University of New York to explore the information behaviors of community college students in the context of an assigned research task.

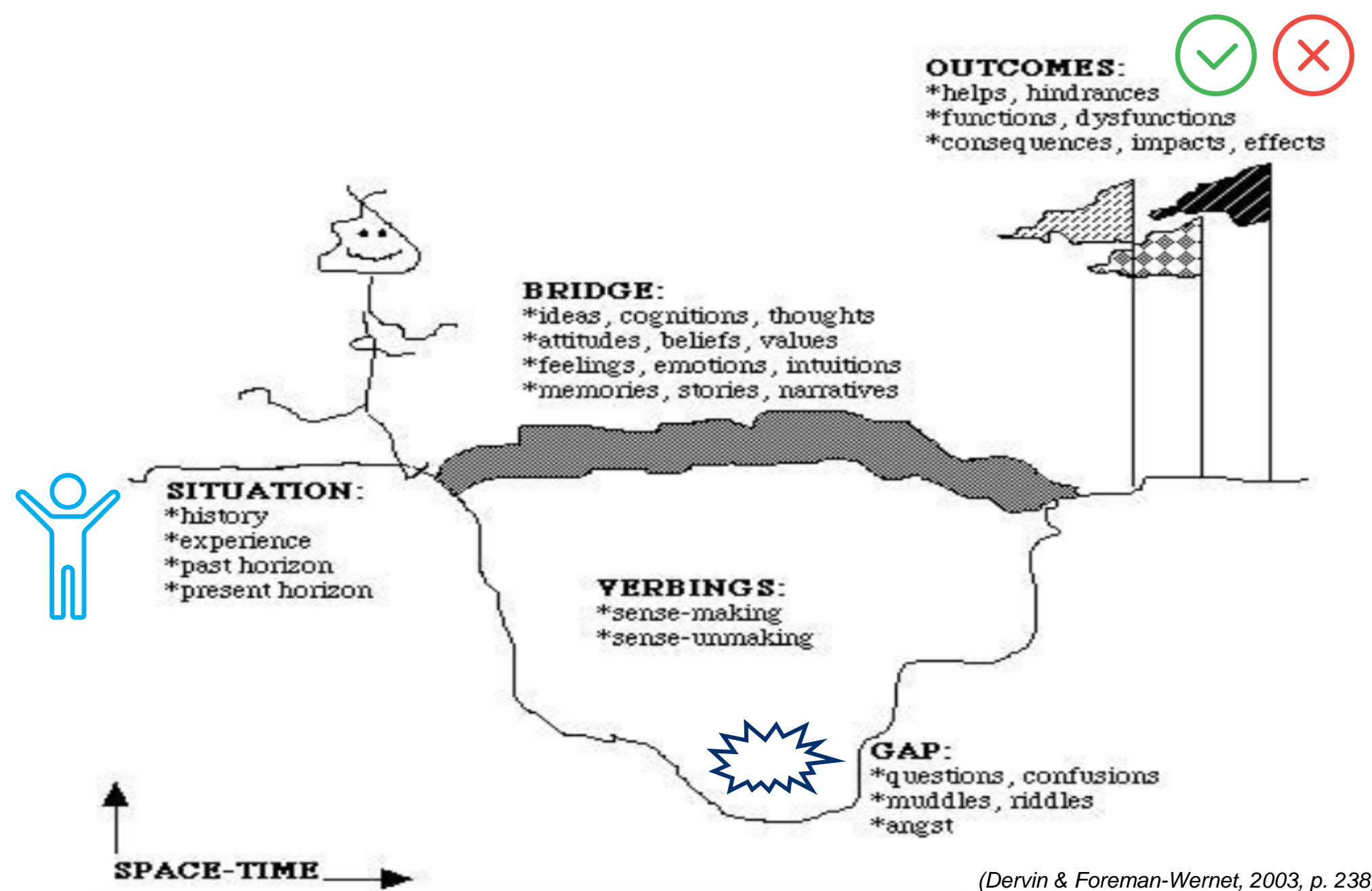
## Background

### Queensborough Community College (QCC)

- Fall 2016 enrollment – 15,569 students
- Diverse urban campus with students from 129 countries, speaking 78 languages
- 79% of all first-time, full-time freshmen receive financial grant aid
- 72% of incoming freshmen require at least one remedial course

### Dervin's Sense-Making Theory of Information Behavior

This project is framed using Dervin's Sense-Making Theory of Information Behavior (Dervin, 1998). Community college students are interviewed and asked to reconstruct their experience in the completion of a research assignment. Per Dervin's model, the assignment is conceived as a time-space journey, and the journey is comprised of a series of student-conceptualized SITUATIONS and GAPS, BRIDGES and OUTCOMES.



## Research Questions

### RQ1

How do community college students make sense of research assignments?

### RQ2

What role does the academic library play in community college students' sense-making processes?

## Methods

### Participants

- QCC students enrolled in ENGL101 – *English Composition I*, a three-credit required course, during Fall 2017 semester
- Recruited from 13 ENGL-101 sections taught by 8 QCC English Department faculty which required a research paper assignment and which attended at least one information literacy session taught by QCC Library Department faculty

### Data Collection

- 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews
- Data collected using Sense-Making's micromoment time-line interview technique (Dervin, 1983); subjects asked to describe their experience in completing the ENGL-101 research assignment
- Each 60-minute interview audio recorded and professionally transcribed
- Each participant received \$50 METRO card upon completion of interview

### Data Analysis

- **Phase I:** "In Vivo" coding of Subject 1-7 transcripts with Analytic Memo Writing - *completed* (Saldana, 2015)
- **Phase II:** "Structural" coding of Subject 1-14 transcripts - *in progress* (Guest et. al, 2012)
- **Phase III:** "Content" coding of Subject 1-14 transcript - *in progress* (Guest et. al, 2012)

## References

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- Guest, G., MacQueen, K.M., and Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Queensborough Community College (2017). *2016-17 Fact Book*. Retrieved from <http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/oira/docs/factbook-2016-17/FactBook-2016-2017.pdf>
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## Phase I Results (Subjects 1-7)

### GAP Confidence

- HELP: Effort**  
"Don't feel embarrassed if you don't know something. I feel like college is not about the smartest person in the world, I feel like it just has to deal with who's willing to do the work." – S3 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)
- HELP: Encouragement**  
"...he (professor) told me, he's like 'your papers are really good,' like and I mean I thought he was being sarcastic but based on the grade of the paper, and then I was like, okay I guess I did really good" – S7 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)
- HELP: Experience**  
"...being here for my first year, I have done things that I thought I wouldn't manage, it's just, I guess along the way you tend to lean things about yourself and they tend to say college is how you find yourself kind of thing" – S5 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

- HINDRANCE: Library databases**  
"I mean it was plentiful, there's a lot of stuff on there, just for my particular cause I didn't find anything so it was kinda deflating, like, oh, this sucks!" – S2 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)  
"...there were very few (articles) that were helpful to my paper, so it was like very limited to me." – S4 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)  
"Sometimes you won't even find one thing what you're talking about on the database because it doesn't have exactly what you're looking for." – S5 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

- HELP: Google**  
"I did find that on Google 'cause I couldn't find it on the database." – S1 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-N)  
"So I slept on it for another day or two and I jumped on Google." – S2 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)  
"Yeah, it was my last night and I needed something else to put in...I was not finding it on the database, so I did look it up on Google." – S6 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-N)

### GAP Secondary Sources

### Assignment GAP

- HINDRANCE: Language**  
"Integrated quotes. I didn't really understand what he meant by that... I didn't get to ask him. I kind of just skipped over that." – S1 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-N)
- HELP: Rubric**  
"I look at the rubric and I look what the professor wants from the assignment...you can't do the assignment if you don't understand what you're doing." – S2 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)
- HELP: Scaffolding**  
"I'm not used to doing this type of essay, but he (professor) explained that we're going to go through each step together and then we shouldn't overreact or freak out because he'd be there for us to help us." – S4 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)



### SITUATION: QCC Student

#### HISTORY: Immediate Past

US High School; US Work Force;  
Non-US High School; Non-US Work Force

#### EXPERIENCE: Previous College

None; Failed; Successful

#### HORIZON: Academic Identity

Neutral; Transforming

### HINDRANCE: Complexity

"...there's...so many different things, so many different ways to cite, so many different formats that it can be a little confusing as to like, do I have a book here with multiple authors or just an article with multiple authors." – S2 (IP-USWF, PC-F, AI-T)

### HELP: Personal Network, Tools

"...I looked at it (Purdue OWL) at first and then while I was looking at it my sister saw me. She was like 'get out of this,' and she went to EasyBib." – S1 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-N)

"Purdue OWL...I love that website. Yeah. Ever since he (professor) mentioned it, day one I've used it every, every, every time." – S4 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

### HELP: Practice

"...now that I do it like constantly here... from like the top of my head, like I know what should be italics, what should not, what should be quoted. It's like I kinda like memorized it all." – S5 (IP-USHS, PC-N, AI-T)

### Citations GAP