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NADE Digest

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Cultivating College Success among Underprepared Students

The Brooklyn College, City University of New York (CUNY), Search for Education Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) Program, a higher education opportunity program, provides special assistance to students who are entering college for the first time. SEEK students are from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, and receive financial support as well as remedial and supplemental instruction, so that they will develop the skills needed to succeed in college. Success is measured by students' grade point averages, retention rates, and graduation rates. Elements of the SEEK model can be used by developmental educators in other academic support models and settings.

JUDITH CORBETT CARTER
BROOKLYN COLLEGE, CUNY

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The transition from high school to college is not always easy, especially for students who are the first in their families to attend college (Benmayor, R., 2002; Choy, S. P., Horn, L.J., Nunez, A.M., & Chen, X., 2002; Terenzini, P., Springer, L., Yaeger, P., Pascarella, E., & Nora, A., 1996). In addition to being the first in their families to attend college, students coming from economically and academically disadvantaged backgrounds are less prepared than their classmates and at a higher risk of attrition during the first year (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003). Special college and university programs specifically designed to meet the needs of these at-risk students seek to provide academic and personal support throughout their undergraduate experiences. The purpose of this paper is to describe one such program, the Brooklyn College, City University of New York (CUNY), Search for Elevation Education and Knowledge (SEEK) Program, which uses a multidimensional approach to provide students from disadvantaged backgrounds instruction in the skills necessary for college persistence and degree attainment. Indications of students' success and practical application for faculty will also be discussed.

Program Overview

The SEEK Program employs a multidimensional approach, providing remedial and supplemental instruction coupled with academic support services. The program's goals are to help its 850 students pass courses and graduate at the same rate as first year students who were deemed college-ready. SEEK faculty and staff provide support services and institutional connections to promote the success of students who are from poor academic and economic backgrounds and who are entering college for the first time. Typically SEEK students are "the best students from the worst high schools" (Maloney, 2003, p. 688) where learning is passive and, oftentimes, simply "showing up" resulted in a passing grade. In the authors' experience, many students who become involved with SEEK come to college attempting to apply strategies to "get by" with minimum effort. In contrast, the program strives to help students become active learners who view education as an ongoing process.

Brooklyn College, CUNY, SEEK Services

At Brooklyn College, all SEEK students are required to attend a Pre-Freshman Summer Institute in which remedial and supplemental instruction is provided (e.g., study skills and small group study). During their first summer, students are enrolled in a Critical Inquiry class. This course, modeled after the college's rigorous core curriculum, is designed to prepare students for the kinds of reading and writing tasks they will face as undergraduate students. The course focuses on a central theme, such as "Freedom and Responsibility," and readings of varied genres are chosen annually to reflect the college's core curriculum. Classes are taught as workshops, with the instructors acting as facilitators. Students are instructed to read texts multiple times, noting structural shifts, lexical items, or any points of interest or confusion. Once a text is thoroughly annotated, students are asked to use their annotations to formulate thoughtful questions, either in small groups or individually. These questions serve as the springboards for class discussions, as well as written assignments. In "writing through their reading," students are "building competence as academic

citizens" (Maloney, 2003, p. 689).

The main goals of the Critical Inquiry class are to teach students to take control of their learning through active, meaningful reading and writing, including multiple readings of texts and multiple drafts of papers; to introduce them to student-centered learning as instructors allow students' questions to frame their classes; and, to enable students to use their experiences to form connections with texts (Maloney, 2003). Oftentimes, first year students are unaware of what is expected of them and are too intimidated to approach faculty. SEEK faculty provide clear explanations of the goals for their assignments, include rubrics, ask students to submit assignments in stages, encourage peer review, require revisions, and offer written feedback on preliminary drafts, all of which can help students develop better writing habits and increase confidence.

During the fall semester, faculty and staff in the SEEK Program strive to promote a sense of community by placing students in blocked courses. First year students are grouped in units and assigned the same academic counselor and, for the most part, the same schedule. The goals are that friendships will be fostered, peer support facilitated, and campus community networks formed to affirm that students "are not alone" in the degree attainment process (Astin, 1977; Chickering, 1969; Frances, Kelly & Bell, 1993; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987; Tinto, 2004). The blocked programming consists of a structured schedule containing English Composition I, Counseling Workshop, mathematics, and a required course drawn from this urban college's mandated liberal arts curriculum. Skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and self-assessment are integrated into these courses.

Outside of the classroom, students receive additional individual support services such as advising, academic counseling, and tutoring. Students are required to attend a minimum of two tutoring sessions per week in mathematics and English, and can add tutoring in more subjects if they desire. Tutors are SEEK faculty and upperclassmen who have demonstrated scholastic ability. Peer tutors also serve as role models, classroom liaisons, and mentors for first-year students.

Indications of Brooklyn College, CUNY, SEEK Students' Success

Indications of SEEK students' success include performance data collected for the college's annual report. According to the CUNY Performance Management Report 2007-08, from the office of Institutional Research Assessment dated July 29, 2008, SEEK students' SAT scores are 30 to 40% lower than students' accepted through regular admission. Brooklyn College, CUNY, SEEK students' pass rate for the basic skills tests is 85.1% compared to the overall CUNY senior college rate of 84.6%. The one-year retention rate for SEEK students is 85% (2007, SEEK Annual Report), which is 5% higher than the college average. 66% of Brooklyn College, CUNY, SEEK students have a grade point average of 3.0 or above. On the CUNY Proficiency Exam, a university-wide test administered to all students before they are allowed to continue their studies as upperclassmen, the pass rate for SEEK students is 100% compared to the 93% pass rate for all other students. The graduation rate for SEEK students is 47% compared to 38% for all other students.

Practical Application of Brooklyn College, CUNY, SEEK Services

Elements from SEEK can be integrated into any developmental studies course or other first-year class. First, by becoming familiar with various campus resources (e.g., writing centers, math labs, tutoring, advising, personal counseling, disability services), faculty can direct students to the appropriate services. Second, by providing clear goals for assignments, rubrics, opportunities for peer review, and revisions, faculty will not only aid students in the process of becoming competent in academic writing, instructors will also improve the quality of work submitted to them. Third, faculty can hold students to high standards, teach strategies that will improve academic performance, and invite students to participate in the intellectual life of the college (Maloney, 2003). Instructors can begin by instilling a sense of self-efficacy in their students, letting them know of other students who entered college labeled as underprepared and have gone on not only to graduate but to achieve honors. SEEK faculty have learned the importance of Maloney's challenge:

If at-risk college students are held to high standards, directly taught strategies for accomplishing good work within academic conventions, informed of the demands of the institution, and treated as colleagues in the shared adventure of learning, they can participate fully and successfully in the intellectual life of the college (2003, p. 664).

SEEK faculty and staff believe that there are benefits to both the timing and structure of this particular program. Starting with a summer institute "allows students to have a head start on college life" (Angel, first-year SEEK student, personal communication, March 22, 2010). Charlene, third-year SEEK student, said, "My summer program was exciting because I met cool professors, knew what was expected of me, learned time management and how to balance work, school, and family while maintaining a good GPA," (personal communication, March 22, 2010).

Value is also added through the blocked classes which provide continuity and integration of materials learned and promote deeper learning (Smith, M. K., 2003, 2009). Blocked courses are also associated with students' increased academic confidence, motivation, and personal responsibility for learning (Astin, 1977; Chickering, 1969; Tinto, 2004). Additionally, a sense of community is fostered, making it easier to create friendships. "As we get to know each other, we help each other understand class work," (Lucie, first-year SEEK student, personal communication, March 22, 2010). Moreover, "having the same teachers and same classmates and traveling together makes students comfortable. It also helped me develop confidence to speak in front of the class," (Ahli, first-year SEEK student, personal communication, March 22, 2010). Finally, by integrating support services such as tutoring into the course requirements and using SEEK faculty as tutors, students who might have been reluctant to seek out these services are more likely to integrate them into their norm of academic experience.

Conclusion

Through both the content and the structure of the Brooklyn College, CUNY, SEEK Program, numerous opportunities for high-quality interaction with faculty and peers in and out of the classroom

are provided to its underprepared students. As a result, program participants have found that they can succeed and achieve their academic goals (Amenkhienan & Kogan, 2004; Astin, 1993; Boylan, 2001; Tinto, 2004).

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Student Evaluation of Instruction: A Primer for Developmental Educators

The use of student evaluation of instruction (SEI) is common place in American higher education. However, there is an open and continuing debate regarding SEI, its reliability and its validity. It is important for developmental educators to be aware of the concerns that exist regarding SEI in order for them to make wise decisions regarding the use of these instruments in their programs and the areas in which they will seek to apply the results of SEI.

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“For many years, educators have agreed that the fundamental purposes of teacher evaluation are both quality assurance and professional development” (White, 2002, p. 10). Therefore, student evaluation of instruction (SEI) is presented by proponents as fulfilling these two necessary roles. However, SEI opponents object to this characterization. A key concern for both groups is the use of SEI in the realm of personnel decision making. As a result a “debate revolving around what kind of measures should be used for...making personnel decisions...[regarding] retention, promotions, tenure, or salary increases, and...faculty effectiveness” (Hobson & Talbot, 2001, p. 3) continues. This has “stimulated intense debate, research, and action at various levels,” (Bangura, 1994, p. 1) including discussions of the methodology, reliability and validity of SEI.

Faculty often believe the primary purpose of SEI is use as a “formative evaluation measure” (Szeto, 1994, p. 9), “to help faculty members improve and enhance their teaching skills” (Hobson & Talbot, 2001, p. 2). SEI serves this purpose when four conditions are met: something new is learned, the new information is valued, the new information can lead to improvement, and faculty are either intrinsically or extrinsically “motivated to make the improvements” (Hobson & Talbot). However, these conditions are not often met. The second use of SEI, summative evaluation, in which they are seen as a “rational, equitable basis for making

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personnel decisions” (Szeto, 1994, p. 10) or as useful “in evaluating the overall effectiveness of an instructor” (Hobson & Talbot) complicates the picture. These coincidental but distinct purposes for SEI, formative and summative assessment, underline the importance of understanding the characteristics of SEI.

SEI Methodology

The arguments advanced for the use of SEI are often pragmatic. Since feedback is desired and students are a primary source of participant feedback regarding instruction, SEI or some other measure is seen as necessary. It is argued that SEI can be performed at “...relatively low cost, [and provide] reduction in biasing error, greater anonymity, and considered answers” (Bangura, 1994, p. 2). Further, it is argued that student evaluations can serve as a catalyst for faculty and administrative consideration of teaching and learning by gathering student input regarding educational programming and instruction (Szeto, 1994, p. 8). Proponents believe that if they are “employed adequately” (Szeto, p. 7), SEI can improve teaching, increase faculty and student satisfaction with teaching, and lead to personal growth for the faculty member. Each of these arguments might be granted if the assumptions of a valid, reliable, consistently implemented instrument could be affirmed. But, these points are all contested.

Detractors attack the utility of SEI. Layne, DeCristoforo and McGinty argue that student evaluations are “time-consuming and costly to administer” (1999, p. 222), produce questionable results because of “the lack of survey administration standardization procedures” (p. 222), and are “often hurriedly completed” (p. 223) in pressure-packed and uncertain circumstances minimizing the quality of the data collected. In addition, student evaluations are anonymous. The lack of respondent accountability allows vengeance to be sought by students and tomfoolery to be practiced which would render SEI results questionable (Bangura, 1994; Fish, 2005). These circumstances from general research in higher education are applicable to the developmental education (DE) classroom as the circumstances under which SEI is employed in both instances are parallel. Further, Bangura states that standardized measures and quantitative methodology limits

student expression and the ability of the survey to measure the “considerable individual variation in frames of reference, values, and levels of understanding” (Bangura, 1994, p. 3) among the respondents. Bangura believes that SEI utilized with multi-ethnic, multi-national or mixed socioeconomic student groups actually suppress student expression by imposing “a constraint” on information gathered and the manner of expression. In many DE programs every class section is multi-ethnic, multi-national or has mixed socioeconomic student groups. Employing SEI in such settings results in a “pervasive disregard of [the] respondent’s social and personal context of meaning... in the questionnaire... and in the modes of interpretive theorizing about responses” (Bangura). Considered together, these arguments show SEI methodology involves assumptions which may not be valid and which may impact an instructor’s or administrator’s ability to identify or address concerns related to a unique classroom setting.

Methodology is not the only element of SEI that has been a point of contention. Concerns related to the reliability and validity of SEI also exist. It is in respect to these two important topics, and one’s beliefs about them, that the arguments regarding SEI turn.

SEI Reliability

The reliability or “consistency of... results” (Linn & Gronlund, 2000, p. 74) of SEI is debated. Proponents of SEI look at results for a single instrument and have demonstrated that ratings for one instructor are stable over time and across populations, that class average ratings are stable, and that the same instrument yields similar results (Obenchain, Abernathy & Wiest, 2001; Olivares, 2003). However, detractors would argue that these are one of three things: 1) examples of the reliability of the instrument in measuring the perceptions of students about instructors’ practices and personality (Hobson & Talbot, 2001); 2) examples of the reliability of the instrument as a measure of some characteristic that is yet to be determined since SEI has low validity (Hobson & Talbot, 2001); or, 3) a representation of the law of averages (Olivares, 2003). These differences in opinion exist as SEI detractors are concerned about “the reliability of the student as an evaluator” (Obenchain, Abernathy & Wiest, 2001, p.3) whereas proponents have focused on

the ability to replicate results with a given instrument. Studies have found that fewer than “one-third of... students... are... consistent in their evaluations” (Obenchian, Abernathy & Wiest, p. 4) of the same instructor when using different instruments. Given this result, the “aggregated reliability measures” reported by proponents “are giving faculty a false sense of security” (Obenchian, Abernathy & Wiest) in general and in DE settings in particular. While instruments can be developed which yield consistent results, “What remains unclear is the reliability of individual students in evaluating faculty teaching effectiveness” (Obenchian, Abernathy & Wiest, p. 6). As “reliability is a necessary... condition for validity” (Linn & Gronlund, p. 75), the absence of evidence for consistency in individual student’s evaluations of instructors gives one pause. What is being sought and is missing is evidence of consistent measures of an instructor’s effectiveness provided by the same student when rating the same course on different but related instruments.

SEI Validity

In addition to questioned reliability, the validity of SEI as a measure of teacher effectiveness is not supported. Validity “addresses... [the] level of confidence that student evaluations are reflections of an instructor’s effectiveness rather than” (Hooper & Page, 1986, p. 4) some other construct. This is the case as “Teacher performance is a dynamic criterion predicated on an ill-defined notion of teacher effectiveness” (Olivares, 2003, p. 237). “Supporters and critics of [SEI]’s concur that ‘teacher effectiveness’ has not been adequately defined and operationalized” (Olivares) by educators and scholars. Put simply, to gather and interpret information one must be certain that the construct being addressed exists, has been clearly defined “that it differs for other constructs, and that the results provide a measure of the construct that is little influenced by extraneous factors” (Linn & Gronlund, p. 83). Each of these concerns will be addressed briefly below in respect to SEI.

Defining Teaching Effectiveness

There is a question regarding “the adequacy of the definition of teacher effectiveness” (Olivares, 2003, p. 234) employed for SEI.

Such a definition “should reflect a set of teacher behaviours that are universally acceptable ‘across the whole range of subjects, levels, students, and circumstances’ and reflect an equally acceptable definition of teacher effectiveness” (Olivares) for without this “it logically follows that any inferences drawn regarding the validity of data or processes to assess teacher effectiveness are seriously compromised” (Olivares, p. 236).

While there is agreement that teaching effectively is a multidimensional construct, there is not general agreement in respect to the components of that construct or the number of characteristics of the enterprise which should be considered when seeking to measure teaching effectiveness. The suggestion that “a set of teacher behaviors that are universally accepted across a wide range of students, contexts and pedagogical methods and reflect an equally acceptable definition of teacher effectiveness” (Olivares, 2003, p. 238) should be employed in SEI to measure teacher effectiveness is sound. However, it becomes problematic as Medley traced the definition of teacher effectiveness through four stages prior to 1986 (Hooper & Page, 1986). These stages focused on different sets of characteristics to define effective instruction.

Even if one is limited to the present emphasis on discovering the characteristics of an effective teacher, there is a wide variety of views. No general agreement exists regarding “the nature and number of dimensions” (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, 2000, p.2) to include. Two component definitions of teaching effectiveness were created by Swartz and Lowman and Mathie, yet these have no common elements (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths). Some definitions of teaching effectiveness include three items. One such definition was developed by Brown and Atkins and another by Patrick and Smart (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths). Orpen identified “seven teaching dimensions” (Orpen, 1981, p. 6). “Other researchers have suggested... seven factors... or nine factors of effective teaching” (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths). Yet, even when expanded to lists of nine characteristics, there is little overlap as portrayed in the lists created by Marsh (Bosshardt, 2001, p. 2) and Centra (Hooper & Page, 1986, p. 57-58). At the extreme end of the spectrum, “Feldman (1988) identified

twenty-two ‘instructional dimensions’ of effective teaching in his research” (Hobson & Talbot, p. 2). Still others argue “that the specific attributes of good teaching vary across courses and instructors” (Bosshardt, 2001, p.2) or that the multidimensional nature of teaching should be expanded from a primarily cognitive emphasis to include “social, civic and personal outcomes” (Shavelson & Huang, 2003, p. 12).

Other scholars question whether the use of SEI to measure teacher effectiveness is not a circular and self-perpetuating system. “One of the issues to consider is whether we are measuring the most important variables of teaching effectiveness or whether some variables are becoming more important just because they are measurable” (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, p. 1). Ultimately, it is important to understand that there is agreement that teaching effectively is a multidimensional construct and, second, that we lack a general agreement regarding the nature of the construct and the number of characteristics of the enterprise which should be considered when seeking to measure teaching effectiveness. All of this is related to one point. “Supporters and critics of [SEI] concur that ‘teacher effectiveness’ has not been adequately defined and operationalized” (Olivares, p. 237) by researchers and educators leaving its measurement in SEI “seriously compromised” (Olivares, p. 236).

Yet, students are asked to employ a definition of teaching effectiveness when completing an SEI. “There is considerable evidence that suggests that students do not hold a common view of teacher effectiveness (Chandler, 1978; McKeachie, 1979) and students are prone to judgment biases (e.g. Scullen et al., 2000; Stanfel 1995)” (Olivares, 2003, p. 237). “Students’ holistic rankings represented their own perceptions of quality teaching with no parameters set by a standardized evaluation instrument” (Obenchain, Abernathy & Wiest, 2001, p. 4). Whether these evaluations are based upon a “personality theory of a good instructor” (Obenchain, Abernathy & Wiest), student “self-interests...within an organizational context” (Olivares), satisfaction of “academic goals” (Olivares) or some other factor or combination remains undetermined, the result is the same. The “‘objectivity’ of students’ evaluative judgments” (Olivares)

is suspect and the “subjectivity in student ratings of teachers is illimitable” (Olivares). “To think that students, who have no training in evaluation, are not content experts, and possess myriad idiosyncratic tendencies, would not be susceptible to errors in judgment [when completing SEI] is specious” (Olivares).

SEI Content

The content of the SEI is another important consideration. “The goal in the consideration of content validation is to determine the extent to which a set of assessment tasks provides a relevant and representative sample of the domain of tasks about which interpretations of assessment results are made” (Linn & Gronlund, 2000, p. 78). This concern is related to SEI as “questions might be relevant in some teaching situations, but not in others” (Fish, 2005, p. 4) and investigations of SEI have found “ambiguous items, positively or negatively skewed items, and items that had no correlation to classroom teaching performance” (Obenchain, Abernathy & Wiest, 2001, p. 1). These factors indicate that content validity may be absent in some SEI instruments.

Influence of Irrelevant Factors

When SEI is used as a measure of teacher effectiveness, one must consider if “it is...unaffected by potential biasing variables” (Olivares, 2003, p. 236). If influenced by “factors that are ancillary or irrelevant to the construct” (Linn & Gronlund, 2000, p. 83), called “construct-irrelevant variance” (Linn & Gronlund), the validity of SEI results is diminished. The question is whether “teacher effectiveness is being measured as opposed to, for example, course difficulty or differences in disciplines, student characteristics, grading leniency, teacher expressiveness, teacher popularity or any number of other variables” (Olivares, 2003, p. 236).

Researchers have found that SEI outcomes are influenced by factors which are not components of teaching effectiveness. These factors are, however, all components of general and DE classrooms. Among these are the level of ease in grading (Wilson, 1998), the student’s “reason for taking the course” (Shevlin,

Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, 2000, p.3), “student emotional states” (Olivares, 2003, p. 238), student “grade expectancies” (Hobson & Talbot, 2001, p. 4), difficulty of the subject, prior preparation of the students (Olivares), student perception of the instructor’s charisma (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, p.1), “class size” (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, p.3), the “academic discipline” (Olivares), and even the perceived sexiness of the instructor (Felton, Mitchell & Stinson, 2004, p. 1). As Shevlin, Banyard, Davies and Griffiths concluded, “overall, research on the effects of extraneous variables on the validity of [SEI] suggests the need for caution in the interpretation of... data” (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, 2000, p.3).

Summation of Concerns

The concerns with the use of SEI to measure teacher effectiveness extend far beyond identifying potential influences on the results. They include questions regarding the methodology of SEI, the content of various instruments, and a valid definition of teaching effectiveness. As Hobson and Talbot wrote, citing multiple researchers, “Validity [for SEI]...is especially difficult to establish because researchers concede that there is no universally accepted criteria for what constitutes effective teaching” (2001, p. 4). As a result “any inferences drawn regarding the validity of data or processes to assess teacher effectiveness are seriously compromised” (Olivares, 2003, p. 236) in all settings including developmental education.

The debate over the validity of SEI will continue. This is due, primarily, to the proponents and detractors generating research on two different but related tracks, the reliability of the instrument and the reliability of the student as an individual evaluator respectively. SEI will also continue to impact American higher education due, in part, to an increasing emphasis on accountability. It is important to note that negative impacts of SEI which have been found by surveying faculty are “reduction in coursework demands on students... lowering grading standards...[that] 50% of respondents [indicated that they] had attempted to improve their ratings in ways they considered inappropriate” and grade inflation (Olivares, 2003, p. 241). Based upon these factors, it is possible to conclude

that “High student opinion survey scores might well be viewed with suspicion rather than reverence, since they might indicate a lack of rigor, little student learning, and grade inflation” (Felton, Mitchell & Stinson, 2004, p. 1). All of these are characteristics to be strongly avoided in general and in developmental education in particular. “Data suggest that the institutionalization of [SEI]’s... as a method to evaluate teacher effectiveness has resulted in students learning less in environments that have become less learning- and more consumer-oriented” (Olivares, p. 243).

An Approach to SEI

A “lack of validity does not mean the [SEI]’s are not useful; rather, it just suggests that [SEI]’s are not measuring what they are intended to measure and therefore inferences regarding teacher effectiveness or student learning should be constrained” (Olivares, 2003, p. 240). This is the case as SEI is not based on an accepted understanding “of teacher effectiveness across instructional settings, academic disciplines, instructors and course levels and types” (Olivares, p. 236), students don’t “hold a common view of teacher effectiveness, and are [not] objective and reliable sources of teacher effectiveness data” (Olivares), the questions asked may not reflect on teaching effectiveness, and there are numerous “potential biasing variables” (Olivares) for SEI. Developmental educators must consider these concerns and means to mitigate them when seeking to utilize SEI, weigh the results, and interpret the significance of these results.

Suggestions for Use of SEI

Given that “In general, student evaluations can [only] be taken to report... student perceptions...[and] Perceptions are not necessarily accurate representations of the objective facts” (Hobson & Talbot, 2001, p. 5; see also Obenchain, Abernathy & Wiest, 2001 and Olivares, 2003), SEI should be approached based upon an informed plan developed in collaboration between faculty and instructional leaders. In this process, faculty members, DE departments, instructional divisions and institutions should clearly define their purposes in using SEI and seek assurance that

their SEI can accomplish these purposes. For example, some institutions conduct SEI early to mid-semester to gauge student perception and to allow for appropriate alteration of the remaining planned instruction and then again at the end of the semester seeking evidence of consistency or change if it was deemed necessary. Divisions and institutions may wish to develop multiple instruments which can be used interchangeably or in conjunction with each other. Certainly, it is imperative that a clear definition of teaching effectiveness in operational terms be developed upon which the instrument(s) are then based and that this definition be communicated to students who are completing the evaluations. For SEI to be employed in a formative manner, a situation which facilitates the four conditions noted in the second paragraph of this article must be established and maintained. Each of these suggestions will involve review of SEI and its content and periods of refining and revision. In all these processes, it is imperative to have the informed input of faculty (DE and general). This will require planning at the institutional and division level and may require professional development to facilitate understanding by all parties of the constructs involved. These suggestions will not change the fact that what is being gathered is information about student perceptions. However, they will create and foster an informed, focused, collaborative and progressive investigation of what students perceive about the instruction they receive, a worthwhile undertaking.

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Assessing the Cost of Redesigning Developmental Mathematics

The number of students needing remediation upon enrollment in post-secondary institutions has risen steadily in recent years. Concurrently, state legislatures and governing boards are putting pressure on higher education institutions to lower budgets. Under these conditions, developmental education programs are often primary budget-tightening targets. In response to this scrutiny, administrators and faculty members at Middle Tennessee State University created a structure that included special sections of two general education mathematics courses. This new design resulted in cost savings for the university and cost and time savings for students. The redesigned curriculum at MTSU has strong implications for post-secondary institutions that find it necessary to reduce expenditures while continuing to serve students who are lacking skills that would prepare them for success in entry-level mathematics courses.

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As the number of students enrolling in higher education increases steadily (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008), the number needing remediation has risen to approximately one-third of all first-year students (Boser & Burd, 2009). The growing need to accommodate high-school graduates who are underprepared for college-level classes has evoked the scrutiny of governmental agencies, institutions of higher education, and the public (Perkhounkova, Noble, & Sawyer, 2005). This has resulted in a debate over the actual cost of educating underprepared students at the collegiate level which has produced no conclusive results to date. Citing various reasons for limitations in the collection of reliable data related to this issue, Saxon & Boylan (2001) concluded

that most studies show remedial or developmental education costs to range from 1% to 2% of educational costs on the whole. Other estimates were higher. In a report on the cost for the state of Michigan, Greene (2000) extrapolated the costs to the national level and estimated an expenditure, including lost productivity and other factors, of over \$16 billion. As public demands for accountability increase, state legislatures and governing boards of higher education often look to lower or eliminate expenditures including reducing or eliminating budgets for developmental education (Shields, 2005).

In response to the focused examination of developmental education programs statewide, administrators and faculty members at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), a public four-year institution, formulated a structure for special sections of two of its general education mathematics courses. These K-sections accommodate the needs of students admitted to the University with ACT Mathematics sub-scores of 17 or 18. Students with these sub-scores were formerly tracked to a developmental studies program (DSP) to take Intermediate Algebra for institutional credit only. Following successful completion of Intermediate Algebra, students in the former design were required to complete another course to satisfy general education credits for mathematics. In the new structure, K-sections of College Algebra and Mathematics for General Studies were created to replace the DSP pattern. Additional topics were added to the curriculum of each course to address deficits in students' algebra skills. Other modifications undertaken included an increase in contact time and the incorporation of an online lab component. Following established guidelines for developmental mathematics courses, the student-teacher ratio remained constant at 25 students per section for the newly designed K-sections (Lucas & McCormick, 2007). The new design was piloted in fall 2006. Data from the new design and the old DSP design were studied to assess differences in cost between the two models. The study considered whether the new design would result in cost savings for the university and also examined the impact on student costs.

Costs to the University

Former DSP Design

Instructional costs for the DSP design are presented in Table 1. The dollar amounts listed for tenured faculty members reflect an average salary of \$50,000 plus 27% for benefits, producing a total of \$63,500 per year or \$31,750 per semester. In the DSP design, tenured faculty taught four sections weighted at three workload hours each per semester. According to university policy ("Guidelines for Determining," 2008), twelve credit-hours (80%) of the semester workload are generated from instruction with an additional three credit-hours (20%) given to research, advising, and service activities. This distribution of faculty workload between instruction and other professional activities yields \$6,350 per course.

Table 1: Temporary

Former DSP Design--Faculty Instructional Costs per Hour

	Tenured	Temporary
Salary per semester	\$31,750	\$22,225
Salary devoted to instruction	\$25,400 ^a	\$22,225 ^b
Instructional salary per course	\$6,350	\$4,445
Contact hours per course	45	45
Out of class hours per course	105	105
Total hours per course	150	150
Cost per hour	\$42	\$30

^aTenured faculty members have 80% of salary devoted to instruction.

^bTemporary faculty members have 100% of salary devoted to instruction.

Consistent with university policy, one credit hour is equated to 50 clock hours. Using 150 clock hours per three credit-hour course, 45 hours were designated as contact hours with the remaining 105 hours classified as out-of-class hours. The instructional cost per course divided by the clock hours devoted to the course produces an instructional cost per hour of \$42. Full-time temporary faculty also taught in the DSP model. For these faculty the average salary

was \$35,000 plus 27% for benefits for a total of \$44,450 per year or \$22,225 per semester. Full-time temporary faculty members taught five sections per semester for a 15-hour instructional workload. One hundred percent of the time, and therefore salary, was devoted to instruction of five courses by part-time, temporary faculty. This resulted in a total cost of \$4,445 per course. The division of contact hours and out-of-class hours was the same for tenured and temporary faculty. Using an equivalent number of clock hours per course generated \$30 per hour instructional cost for temporary faculty. Tenured faculty teaching 27 sections generated 4,050 work hours. At \$42 per hour, the total cost was \$170,100. Temporary faculty teaching 14 sections generated 2,100 hours of work. At \$30 per hour, the total cost was \$63,000. Adding instructional costs for tenured and temporary faculty gave a grand total of \$233,100. Dividing this total by 1,027, the number served in the period under consideration, students yielded an instructional cost of \$227 per student for the DSP model.

New Course Design

Table 2 presents the instructional costs for the new course design. In the new model, additional contact time and a laboratory component are included (Lucas & McCormick, 2007). These supplementary features resulted in four hours of workload per K-section. In the new course design, tenured faculty taught three K-sections per semester yielding the same 12-hour workload. This resulted in no change in faculty instructional costs per hour. However, full-time temporary faculty members taught four K-sections per semester to produce a 16-hour workload. The extra workload hour, beyond the required 15, was compensated using the adjunct pay rate that averaged \$625 per credit hour. Adding this amount to the average salary, \$17,500, plus 27% for benefits, resulted in a total of \$23,019 per semester per part-time faculty member.

In the DSP design, there were 150 clock hours allotted to each course. In the new design, each course carried a four-hour workload that by university policy equates to 200 clock hours. The same number of sections with the 25 student ceiling were offered in both models. As a result, the same number of sections was used

Table 2

New Design--Faculty Instructional Costs per Hour

	Tenured	Temporary
Salary per semester	\$31,750	\$23,019
Salary devoted to instruction	\$25,400 ^a	\$23,019 ^b
Instructional salary per course	\$8,467	\$5,755
Contact hours per course	75	75
Out of class hours per course	125	125
Total hours per course	200	200
Cost per hour	\$42	\$29

^aTenured faculty members have 80% of salary devoted to instruction.

^bTemporary faculty members have 100% of salary devoted to instruction.

to calculate the instructional costs for tenured and temporary faculty. Tenured faculty teaching 27 sections completed 5,400 hours of work. At \$42 per hour, the total cost was \$226,800. Temporary faculty teaching 14 sections resulted in 2,800 hours of work. At \$29 per hour, the total cost was \$81,200. Adding instructional costs for tenured and temporary faculty gave a grand total of \$308,000. Dividing by 1,027 students produced an instructional cost of \$300 per student for the new design.

Costs to Students

The investigation of the special course offerings at MTSU considered the impact on students' expenditures in addition to chronicling institutional cost. Table 3 displays the student fee structure for the DSP design. It reflects state policy that required public universities to charge community college rates for developmental courses (Tennessee Board of Regents [TBR], 2001). In the first semester, students paid the community college rate of \$285 to register for DSP courses while the university absorbed the difference (\$348 per three-credit hour course). Successful completion of Intermediate Algebra was defined as earning a grade of C or better. Students who met this criterion in the first semester then enrolled in curricular mathematics courses to

satisfy general education mathematics requirements paying \$633 in tuition. Students repeating the DSP course in the second and/or third semesters continued to pay the \$285 community college rate. Over the three-semester period, the total cost absorbed by the university for students enrolled in the DSP course was \$878,004. Table 3 shows the number of students who advanced from the DSP courses in the second semester and those who repeated DSP math. Thirty-five percent of students failed to pass DSP mathematics in the first semester and had to repeat the course. The number of students who advanced to curricular mathematics but then had to repeat it in the third semester was 43% (Lucas & McCormick, 2007). Students completing DSP mathematics were awarded three hours of institutional credit, and students completing curricular mathematics were awarded three hours of general education mathematics credit.

Table 3

Former DSP Design--Student Fee Structure

Semester	Course	Students	Cost ^a	Total
1st	DSPM 0850	1,713	\$285	\$488,205
2nd	MATH 1010/1710	1,113	\$633	\$704,529
	DSPM 0850 repeaters	600	\$285	\$171,000
3rd	MATH 1010/1710 (passed DSPM 0850 2nd semester)	390	\$633	\$246,870
	MATH 1010/1710 repeaters	479	\$633	\$303,207
	DSPM 0850 repeaters	210	\$285	\$59,850
TOTAL				\$1,973,661

^aStudents taking DSP courses at the university were charged the community college rate of \$285.

In the new design, students with ACT mathematics sub-scores of 17 or 18 are placed directly into K-sections without completing DSP mathematics. Students are charged \$633 per course for these credit-bearing general education classes. Table 4 shows the revenues generated in the form of student tuition for

the initial semester of the redesign and for students repeating in the two subsequent semesters.

Table 4

New Design--Student Fee Structure

Semester	Course	Students	Cost	Total
1st	MATH 1010K/1710K	1,713	\$633	\$1,084,329
2nd	Repeaters	564	\$633	\$357,012
3rd	Repeaters	186	\$633	\$117,738
TOTAL				\$1,559,079

Findings

Careful examination of the costs associated with redesigning the mathematics curriculum for underprepared students showed savings for students and for the university. In the new course design, students received needed remediation and completed their general education mathematics requirement in one semester at a total instructional cost per student of \$300. While this amount appeared to be an increase over the former model, the redesign eliminated one semester of mathematics course requirements for each student. In the DSP program, students had to complete DSP mathematics prior to enrolling in a general education mathematics course. The DSP model translated to \$227 of instructional cost per student plus the additional instructional cost for the subsequent general education mathematics course resulting in an instructional cost total of \$454 per student. The instructional cost in the new design is significantly less. With the elimination of one course, the instructional cost to the university was reduced by \$154 per student or \$263,802 for 1,713 students. The university experienced a further cost savings of \$878,004 because it no longer had to absorb the difference between university student tuition rate and the community college tuition rate for DSP courses. With the new design, the university realized a total savings of \$1,141,806.

Student fees associated with the former design generated \$719,055 for DSP courses with institutional credit only. Over a

three-semester period in the DSP design, the student fee structure totaled \$1,973,661, while the student fee structure for a similar period in the redesign totaled \$1,559,079. In the redesign, students spent \$414,582 less in tuition fees and received general education mathematics credit. As a result of the DSP mathematics course being eliminated, students realized textbook savings of \$171,300 (1,713 students at \$100 per textbook). With the new model, overall student savings amounted to \$585,882.

In addition to monetary savings, the new design eliminated one semester of student coursework. Many researchers have noted that the extra time students are required to devote to developmental education is a deterrent to actual degree completion. Seventy-one percent of post-secondary students eventually earn a college degree if they have fulfilled their college-mathematics requirements by the end of their sophomore year (Adelman, 2006). In light of this research, reducing students' coursework by one semester may have a positive effect on graduation rates of underprepared students.

Conclusion

In view of the number of students needing remediation in post-secondary education and given the limited availability of fiscal resources, the redesign model piloted at Middle Tennessee State University has strong implications. While the nation seeks to increase the number of citizens with higher-education degrees, post-secondary institutions are finding it necessary to reduce expenditures as they continue to serve an underprepared student population lacking the skills for success in entry-level mathematics courses. The MTSU model equips students with relevant skills while providing a cost benefit to the state, to the university, and to the student. It is crucial to point out that eliminating a course merely to reduce the developmental education budget can be easily accomplished. However, the goal should be to restructure in a manner that not only lowers costs, but also provides the needed remediation of skills and the timely completion of general education mathematics. The ultimate goal is to better position students for success in achieving collegiate and career aspirations at a lower cost.

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Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom: A Student Wellness Learning Community

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*Developmental educators are often familiar with the benefits of learning communities and with the importance of incorporating research-based best practices into their developmental studies courses. Faculty may be less familiar with the educational applications based on the concepts of emotional intelligence (EI). Faculty at College of the Mainland created a learning community for incoming developmental freshman that incorporated the concepts of EI from the work of Golman along with principles from Chickering's (1991) *Seven Principles of Good Practice* and Boylan's (2002) *What Works: A Guide to Research-Based Best Practices in Developmental Education*. Faculty found that the EI strategies provided a common language and a useful framework for planning instructional materials and activities.*

In February 2005, faculty from the Academic Success Department (ASD) at College of the Mainland (COM) attended a conference (Low & Nelson) where they learned about the use of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the classroom. This experience inspired them to design a learning community that would incorporate the principles of EI into some of their developmental studies and credit courses.

College of the Mainland is a community college located in Texas City, Texas, with a fluctuating attendance of 2,500 to 5,000, depending on the semester. Given the diverse nature of the student population—approximately 57% Caucasian, 17% African American, 20% Hispanic and 3% other (Friedrich, 2007)—and the large number of students testing into developmental courses, developmental faculty believed that EI principles and strategies would fit with their curricula and help to address the academic and personal needs of their developmental students.

COM's Academic Success Department includes three remedial subject areas: reading, which has three levels; writing, three levels; and mathematics, four. For this learning community, faculty elected to link three courses using the theme of student wellness: Psychology for Success, a developmental and college-level course focused on EI concepts, study skills, problem solving, career decisions, goal setting, and personal awareness; Writing Improvement 0360, the second in the three-level sequence, a course which involved the basic writing and grammar skills needed for academic coursework and workforce certifications; and Introduction to Physical Education, which was a college-level orientation class on personal health and physical education. Faculty wanted students who were new, incoming developmental freshmen with no prior college-level academic or social experiences. The sole placement criteria was the need for Writing Improvement 0360. Instructors wanted learning community students to encounter what Tinto (1987, p. 602) described as "learning as a shared rather than isolated experience" and, as Boylan (2002, p. 67) suggested, to "work collaboratively in small groups or teams to solve problems, study, or develop class projects and benefit by having larger blocks of time for sustained discussions and activities."

In planning the Student Wellness Learning Community (SWLC), faculty drew from three sources. First, they aligned the goals and objectives for the SWLC with Chickering's (1991) Seven Principles of Good Practice:

Chickering's Principles	SWLC Goals
1. Encourage contact between students and faculty.	1. Increase attendance.
2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.	2. Increase retention.
3. Encourage active learning.	3. Increase pass rates.
4. Give prompt feedback.	
5. Emphasize time on task.	SWLC Objectives
6. Communicate high expectations.	1. Recognize and enhance learning styles.
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.	2. Develop emotional intelligence skills.
	3. Increase basic skills, such as writing and research, health and nutrition, and intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships needed for success in college and in life.

Second, in planning instructional activities they followed guidelines outlined in Boylan's (2002) *What Works: A Guide to Research-Based Best Practices in Developmental Education*. Boylan identified several important practices including the use of varied instructional methods, frequent and timely feedback to students, mastery learning, developmental course content that is linked to college-level requirements, shared instructional strategies, critical thinking instruction, active-learning techniques, and the use of classroom assessments as defined in *Classroom Assessment Techniques* (Angelo & Cross, 1993). SWLC instructors focused on creating safe classroom settings, used mastery learning techniques such as expert groups to teach concepts, linked content across their disciplines, focused on critical thinking through the use of real-life scenarios, created active-learning opportunities (Bonham, 2006), and used a variety of classroom assessment techniques.

Third, by incorporating the concepts of EI into the classroom, faculty believed that they could provide students with additional strategies for achieving academic success through using Emotional Intelligence, which is defined as:

the capacity to reason about emotions, and use emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004, p. 197).

According to Daniel Goleman, EI expert and author, the EI concept is being used through social and emotional learning (SEL) programs in "tens of thousands of schools worldwide" (Goleman, 2010, p. 6), and "in the U.S. many districts and even entire states currently make SEL a curriculum requirement, mandating that just as students must attain a certain level of competence in mathematics and language, so too should they master these essential skills of living."

Used as the core of the SWLC curriculum was Low and Nelson's *Emotional Intelligence* (2003) textbook which introduced

five “beliefs about emotional intelligence and achievement”:

1. Emotional intelligence is the single most important influencing variable in personal achievement, career success, leadership, and life satisfaction.
2. Emotional intelligence is a learned ability requiring a systematic experience-based approach to learning.
3. Schools and colleges do not provide a practical and systematic model to learn emotional intelligence.
4. Learning emotional knowledge and skills requires an intentional, active learner-centered approach involving self-directed coaching, mentoring, and visualization.
5. Emotional intelligence consists of specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes that can be learned, applied, and modeled by students to improve personal satisfaction, achievement, and career effectiveness. (Low and Nelson, 2003, p. xiii)

Further information by Daniel Goleman (2010) concluded that “Now the case can be made scientifically: helping children improve their self-awareness and confidence, manage their disturbing emotions and impulses, and increase their empathy pays off not just in improved behavior but in measurable academic achievement”.

Under Low and Nelson’s EI model, there were four “competency areas with related skills” for personal development (2003, p. xv-xvii):

Interpersonal Skills:

- Assertion—ability to clearly and honestly communicate personal thoughts and feelings to another person in a comfortable, direct, appropriate, and straightforward manner
- Aggression—a potential problem area that negatively affects relationships; involves anger emotion that must be understood and converted...
- Deference—results in ineffective communications that negatively affect relationship; involves fear emotion that must be understood and converted...

Leadership Skills:

- Social Awareness—ability to choose the appropriate emotional, social, and physical distance during verbal and nonverbal interactions with others; to impact and influence others in positive ways.
- Empathy—ability to accurately understand and constructively respond to the expressed feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and needs of others.
- Decision Making—ability to plan, formulate, initiate, and implement effective problem-solving or conflict-resolution procedures to resolve personal problems and to use a skills approach when making decisions
- Positive Influence—ability to positively impact, persuade, and influence others and make a positive difference

Self-Management Skills

- Drive Strength—ability to effectively direct personal energy and motivation to achieve personal, career, and life goals
- Commitment Ethic—ability to complete tasks, projects, assignments, and personal responsibilities in a dependable and successful manner, even under difficult circumstances
- Time Management—ability to organize tasks into a personally productive time schedule and use time effectively to complete tasks
- Change Orientation—degree to which an individual is or is not satisfied and the magnitude of change necessary or desired to develop personal and professional effectiveness

Intrapersonal Skills

- Self-Esteem—ability to view Self as positive, competent, and successful
- Stress Management—ability to choose and exercise healthy self-control and self-management in response to stressful events

Although each course within the SWLC was taught by a different instructor, the instructors coordinated assignments so that the content of the three courses was linked using EI

concepts and terminologies tied to active-learning strategies. Writing Improvement assignments reflected the EI concepts concerned with the Self which were covered in the Psychology for Success course, and Physical Education included EI instruction by addressing the physical well-being of the student. EI terminology and concepts were introduced to students on the first day of classes. For example, instructors explained their course syllabi as contracts between professors and students. Then instructors reviewed goals, outcomes, and expectations for academic and personal successes along with the sequence of developmental classes students would follow. The EI concepts used in the team-building activities during the first week of instruction included interpersonal, intrapersonal, self-management, and leadership skills.

A first-day activity in Writing Improvement had students completing BINGO sheets with statements reflecting personal information such as “find someone who lives in the same town/city as you,” “find someone who is taking a math class,” or “find someone who enjoys the same hobby as you.” Each square asked for contact information so students could build contact sheets in case of future questions or missed assignments. This activity reinforced leadership skills and interpersonal skills under the EI concepts.

All students took a learning styles assessment test the first day of class in Writing Improvement, and, in each of the three learning community courses, instructors presented tips for classroom success associated with various learning styles, such as auditory, kinesthetic, or visual (Hammett, 2006, pp. 6-7). Students shared their learning styles in small group settings which emphasized interpersonal and leadership skills. Then students discussed strategies they would use to help them learn class materials, an activity that encourages the use of self-management skills.

Throughout the course as each of the four competency areas were covered in Psychology for Success, the students took self-assessment quizzes located in Low and Nelson’s *Emotional Intelligence* (S. Henderson, personal communication, March, 19, 2009). These assessments followed the Emotional Learning System

based on the difference between “emotional and experience-based learning that is different from traditional academic content learning” (Low & Nelson, 2003, p. xv):

The system was designed to ensure a learner-centered development process built on honest positive self-assessment. The five steps were as follows:

Step A (Self-Assessment: Explore) requires that you develop an intentional self-assessment habit: inquiring, discovering, and questioning.

Step B (Self-Awareness: Identify) involves the process of identifying your experience as either a thought or a feeling.

Step C (Self-Knowledge: Understand) involves “insight” and an understanding that allows you to make choices about how to behave.

Step D (Self-Development: Learn) involves learning various ways to improve your behavior.

Step E (Self-Improvement: Apply and Model) requires that you apply and model emotionally intelligent behavior to achieve personal, career, and academic goals. (Low and Nelson, 2003, p. xv)

The “Self-Assessment” quizzes listed statements that students applied to their own lives. In response to the statements, students circled one of three answers: M for Most Often, S for Sometimes, or L for Least Often; the answers were worth points: M = 2, S = 1, L = 0 (Low & Nelson, 2003, p. 37). Students added up the points based on their answers and then transferred their scores to an extended profile where they determined if they were within a low, normal, or high range for each of the four competency areas. Before students exited the course, re-assessments were taken to determine if their emotional intelligence awareness and skills had increased or decreased.

To help instructors introduce themselves to students, a Road of Life Map from Hammett's Developmental Writing Workshop was used. Students then began their own Road of Life Maps assignment in Psychology for Success by choosing and illustrating events that represented the high points and low points of their lives (Hammett, 2006, p. 61). In small groups, students shared their maps and became aware of others' cultures, their accomplishments, and other important life events. This activity reinforced social awareness and empathy under the concept of leadership skills. It also helped to build a safe community of writers within the writing classroom.

Students were encouraged to make connections between the three classes through instructors' mentoring, collaboration, and use of EI terminology. The students used EI vocabulary to relate their accomplishments and their concerns regarding their college experiences with each of the instructors. As one SWLC student, Trace, shared from the Psychology for Success course evaluation, "This class should be required of all students to take. I came out of this class more goal-oriented and no longer have self-esteem issues. I learned the importance of having goals and how to deal with the obstacles that come in the way." The constant communication among the instructors reinforced assignments and attendance, and encouraged students to work for academic and personal successes. Fabiola, another SWLC student, commented in course evaluations, "In this class I learned a lot of new things about situations in life. I learned how to manage my time and how to make good grades."

In the Writing Improvement class, writings correlated to the Psychology for Success activities through compare and contrast writings. In pairs, students discussed and wrote a collaborative essay about their similarities and differences; any topic could be used such as hobbies, travels, or physical characteristics. The in-class assignment helped with relationship building, reinforcement of writing skills and processes, and understanding of EI terminologies and concepts. Many students noted that the paired writing assignment was more difficult than individual essays, citing the challenge of employing the EI self-management skills of time management, commitment ethic, and the abilities to complete

tasks.

The Psychology for Success class used hands-on activities, role playing scenarios, and YouTube and DVD movie clips to enhance students' understandings of the EI concepts (S. Henderson, personal communication, March 19, 2009). At the end of the semester, students watched the video, Coach Carter (Robbins, Scanlon, Gale, Tollin, & Morales, 2005) about a coach who inspired a group of unruly boys to be successful on and off the basketball court. Then students discussed and wrote about emotional changes in the movie's characters which helped them apply the four competency areas of EI to everyday life. Noting this connection in her own life, Nayely said, "This is a really helpful class because the skills helped me think before I act" (College of the Mainland Marketing, 2008).

In addition, the use of an EI planner with correlated EI activities reinforced the skills listed under the four competency areas. For example, students used an illustration of an empty clock face to log their daily activities and then discussed with the whole group where their time was being spent. Discovering how time was being spent, whether wasted or productive, was enlightening to many. The planner contained activities such as blank calendars for students to complete with class information, academic checklists for scoring student behaviors, and personal and academic successes, hints, and tips (C. Moran, personal communication, August 28, 2008). Krystal, an SWLC student, explained how she was learning to use some of these strategies:

"The most important skill I learned in this class (SWLC) is how to be a better person in general. I have learned to deal with my problems in an effective way. I can schedule my day the way I want and not let time run my life, and most important, I have figured out what I want to do in the future." (College of the Mainland Marketing, 2008)

The Physical Education instructor focused on using the EI terminology to enhance students' well-being. For the walk/run course, the instructor developed a map showing distances from COM to other cities. Students set goals and then met their goals by walking or running the distances until they reached their

destinations; this reinforced drive strength and commitment throughout the course (A. Bass, personal communication, February 9, 2008). The students also kept food journals, which provided practice with basic writing skills, and calculated their calorie intakes versus calories burned through class activities. Under the instructor's supervision, students' physical measurements were taken at the beginning of the semester and then compared with those taken at the end of the semester. Communication between students and the instructor was crucial for personal improvements to occur. Decision making, time management, stress management, and self-esteem were addressed throughout the Physical Education class (A. Bass, personal communication, February 9, 2008).

SWLC Issues and Changes

SWLC instructors encountered several problems not related to instruction. The first involved marketing. "Getting the word out" proved to be harder than anticipated. The instructors placed advertisements in student catalogues, hung posters in various campus buildings, made visits to Advisement, and informed counselors. Second, in spite of the requirement that students be enrolled in all three SWLC courses, a number of students were consistently enrolled in only one or two of the three, and scheduling remained a problem that was never adequately resolved. A third challenge for SWLC instructors was finding the best order for the blocked courses. In the end, the best option scheduled classes from 8:00 a.m. to 12:20 p.m., starting with Psychology for Success, followed by Writing Improvement, and ending with Physical Education. This set-up pleased the students since they did not have to re-dress for classes after physical work-outs.

There were a number of positive changes made from semester to semester. One was revising the curriculum of the Physical Education class from a textbook-based course to a walk/run class with individual goals set by students. This change allowed students to leave the classroom environment for field trips to local walking/jogging trails, and some of the students competed in a community marathon (A. Bass, personal communication, February 9, 2008). As the students discovered, using EI in their personal lives equaled success. "This class has really helped me find myself

and know where I stand in life. Now I value myself," said Victor, an SWLC student (College of the Mainland Marketing, 2008).

The second positive change instructors made was the use of class time for tutoring and instructor help. In a study completed by the Academic Success Department internal researcher in December of 2006, data showed that tutored students withdrew from classes at significantly lower rates than non-tutored students (Elliott, 2006). Of the students who received tutoring for developmental courses at COM, 73% passed those courses with a grade of A, B, or C compared to a 55.4% pass rate for those not receiving tutoring (Elliott, 2006). Given this information, the writing instructor used class time to take students to the computer laboratory to sign up for extra out-of-class tutoring, to use the professional tutoring services, and to receive one-on-one instructor help.

Outcomes: Data

Faculty identified three overall goals for the EI learning community—to increase attendance, retention, and pass rates for this group compared to the rates for developmental students not in the SWLC. While the number of students enrolled within COM's learning community setting was low—the largest group was seventeen—data show some success in meeting these goals. Although no formal data were gathered for attendance purposes, the learning community instructors noticed that peers used a variety of techniques to encourage classmates to attend classes. Students would send instant messages or texts and call peers who were late or absent for classes. Students attended regularly throughout the learning community courses and were very supportive of one another.

Faculty also wanted to impact retention. Fall to spring retention for this group of students was good: fall 2005 to spring 2006—100%; fall 2006 to spring 2007—83.3% (Friedrich, 2010). Retention rates for developmental students as a whole for these same time periods were 64% and 67% (Elliott, 2009). However, because enrollments for the SWLC sections were small, these rates cannot be appropriately compared, nor can conclusions be drawn about the effect of the learning community on retention, especially since spring to fall retention rates for the SWLC were only three

percentage points higher than the rates for other developmental students. EI faculty had hoped that over time, with more learning communities, additional retention data could have been collected.

Faculty had also wanted to increase pass rates. As shown in Table 1, grade distributions for students in the SWLC sections of PHED 1107 for fall 2005, spring 2006, and fall 2006 were similar to those for the students in other sections with approximately the same percentage of students earning a grade of ABC across all semesters in all sections. A higher percentage of SWLC students earned a grade of D or F; however, because of the small number of SWLC students each semester, these percentages cannot be appropriately compared. The grade distributions for the PSYC 2312 were also similar across all sections, although no grades of D or F were awarded to SWLC students.

Faculty were especially interested in improving pass rates for English 0360. As shown in Table 2, data for this class did show that after the first semester, there were differences in the success rates between the SWLC sections and the non-LC sections. These differences can be seen in three ways: the percentage of students earning A, B, or C grades; the percentage of students earning a D or F; and the percentage of students who withdrew. In addition, the percentage of students who received an R, or Repeat, grade was also lower for these final two semesters of SWLC students. Again, because of the small numbers, statistical comparisons cannot appropriately be made, but the differences are notable: 82.3% of the SWLC students earned a grade of A, B, or C whereas 46.6% of the non-learning community students earned a grade of A, B, or C in spring 2006. In fall 2006, the percentages were 77.1% to 55.6%. If this pattern had continued and aggregate data collected over two or three more semesters, appropriate statistical comparisons might have been possible.

However, it should also be noted that at College of the Mainland, some sections of ENGL 0360 are multi-level classes with ENGL 0330 students enrolled in the same sections. This would not have been true for the SWLC sections, another confounding factor in any effort to make grade comparisons. Nonetheless, these results were encouraging to instructors since raising pass rates for ENGL 0360 students was one of their goals.

Table 1

Grade Comparisons of Learning Community and Non-Learning Community Students in PHED 1107

Grade	Fall '05 SWLC	Fall '05 Non-LC	Spring '06 SWLC	Spring '06 Non-LC	Fall '06 SWLC	Fall '06 Non-LC
ABC	64.7 (11)	70.6 (205)	70.5 (12)	74.2 (208)	72.2 (13)	72.7 (184)
DF	29.4 (5)	2.7 (8)	0	2.1 (6)	11.1 (2)	1.9 (5)
I	5.8 (1)	2.0 (6)	0	1.7 (5)	0	.79 (2)
W	0	24.4 (71)	29.4 (5)	21.7 (61)	16.6 (3)	24.5 (62)

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate the total N for the group. Other numbers are percentages. A grade of I is a temporary grade indicating that, in the instructor's judgment, the student can complete the course objectives within a specified extension of time. A grade of W represents Withdrawal on or before the date as specified in the college calendar.

Table 2

Grade Comparisons of Learning Community and Non-Learning Community Students in ENGL 0360

Grade	Fall '05 SWLC	Fall '05 Non-LC	Spring '06 SWLC	Spring '06 Non-LC	Fall '06 SWLC	Fall '06 Non-LC
ABC	47.0 (8)	43.6 (48)	82.3 (14)	46.6 (55)	77.1 (14)	55.6 (108)
DF	11.7 (2)	30.9 (34)	0	11.0 (13)	11.1 (2)	15.9 (31)
I	0	0	0	0	0	0
W	0	9.0 (10)	11.7 (2)	29.6 (35)	5.5 (1)	20.6 (40)
R	41.7 (7)	15.49 (17)	5.89 (1)	11.0 (13)	5.5 (1)	7.2 (14)

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate the total N for the group. Other numbers are percentages. A grade of I is a temporary grade indicating that, in the instructor's judgment, the student can complete the course objectives within a specified extension of time. A grade of W represents Withdrawal on or before the date as specified in the college calendar. A grade of R shows the need to re-enroll in individualized study class or repeat the course; student made progress but did not meet course objectives.

Where Are We Now?

Many of the students involved in the Student Wellness Learning Community continue to keep in touch with the SWLC instructors and with one another, and they are still enrolled

in classes at COM; some will have graduated by Spring 2010. Although each cohort group spent only one semester in the learning community, those enrolled in the SWLC classes made connections between managing their emotional intelligence and their personal and academic successes. Even though quantitative data were unimpressive, the personal remarks from students and the mentoring that continues between instructors and the SWLC students have been encouraging to the SWLC instructors. "It was like a family... and when the classes were over, it was like my family had broken up... I miss it!" exclaimed Jarrod, an SWLC student (COM Marketing, 2008).

While studies have shown that the learning community structure itself (Tinto, 1987) and the best practices (Boylan, 2002) which faculty incorporated into the SWLC could be expected to have a positive impact on student retention and academic performance, faculty found that the EI strategies provided a common language and an additional framework for planning instructional materials and activities. Although the SWLC no longer exists at COM, SWLC instructors continue to use EI in their courses, encouraging students to document important dates, practice leadership skills, and employ the EI self-management skills of commitment ethic, communicating effectively, and planning for and completing tasks.

Based on the personal reports of their SWLC students, College of the Mainland SWLC faculty believe that incorporating these EI skills into the curriculum was well worth the effort. For more information on the Student Wellness Learning Community, emotional intelligence classroom activities and implementation, or to review students' project samples, please contact Beth Hammett.

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College Online Developmental Reading Instruction: Creating A Path to Independent and Active Learning

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Online courses require students to be independent readers and efficient learners. College students who need developmental reading lack these qualities; consequently, faculty do not generally view developmental reading courses as appropriate for an online format. However, an effectively designed online course based on best practices can engage less confident students and also promote active learning. The goal is to provide ways to enhance students' college-level reading skills and to develop independent learning. This paper discusses one instructor's online reading course that uses Web tools to create an active learning environment.

When creating an online developmental reading course for first-year traditional and non-traditional college students, an instructor is faced with a new challenge. Online courses require students to be independent readers and efficient learners, and, in general, first-semester college students are encouraged to take face-to-face classes, especially if they are not strong readers (McWhorter, 2009) or independent learners. However, the development of independent learning skills is necessary for students to succeed (DeBraak, 2008).

Many students have ineffective, passive reading habits (Paul & Elder, 2008). In fact, 47% of all college-bound students taking the ACT exam are not meeting the benchmark score of 21 that indicates preparedness for college-level reading (ACT News, 2009). When learning online, students need to self-regulate and meet specific deadlines. Self-regulation in underprepared students may be a distinguishing factor between those students in developmental and regular classes (Ley & Young, 1998). The challenge then is to

create and teach an effective online college developmental reading course with Web tools that promote reading comprehension skills, student efficacy, and independent learning.

A Taxonomy for Learning Theories

No single theory is used when designing an online course (Ally, 2008). Some aspects of an online developmental reading course involve using behaviorist strategies to teach the “what,” such as vocabulary drill and practice; cognitive strategies to teach the “how,” or process and principles of active reading; and constructivist strategies to teach the “why,” such as higher level thinking and transfer of reading skills to other contexts (2008). Ertmer & Newby (1993) view this combination of theories as a taxonomy for learning.

Metacognition Theory

For students to become responsible for their own learning, they must be able to use metacognition—the process of being aware of one’s own thinking patterns (Mayer 1998; Sternberg, 1998; Yorke & Knight, 2004). In an online reading course, metacognition involves using appropriate strategies to focus on following directions, taking self-tests, writing periodic self-evaluations and reflections, and completing online practices that provide immediate feedback. Online learning allows students to read at their own pace and reflect on what they have read, to make errors without direct observation of others, and to learn from their errors without feeling competition with fellow students. For example, online reading students log in to an exercise center on a daily/weekly basis where they can complete multiple exercises until mastering a particular skill. By “competing” with themselves for mastery, they build confidence.

Social Presence Theory

Besides educational theories, affective elements that promote a sense of belonging in a cyberspace classroom are germane to student course satisfaction. Teacher-student and peer

immediacy behaviors positively affect student perception of the online learning environment (Johnson & Card, 2007). Effective online teaching and learning require participants to project a social presence that helps them connect and relate to one another (Johnson & Card 2007). Instructor and student immediacy skills can be exhibited in a variety of ways, both verbal and nonverbal. For example, a powerful way to create social presence is timeliness, or quick turnaround time, when providing students with personal feedback (Johnson & Card, 2007). When doing so, greeting students and addressing them by name also reflect high immediacy (connection with others) . Students can also project social presence in their online discussion groups by using cohesive language, such as “we,” “our,” and “us” and acknowledging what other group members have to say by agreeing or disagreeing.

Asynchronous Interaction

One of the strong advantages of online learning is that students can interact but can do so at different times, resulting in what is known as asynchronous communication. On the other hand, synchronous communication, interacting in real time online, is not required for meaningful interaction (Smith, 2003). In an online reading course, students can develop a sense of community with each other and the instructor through a number of asynchronous communication and learning tools available to them such as video clips, PowerPoint presentations, digital flashcards, discussion boards, collaborative groups, and class blogs.

Brief video clips

To introduce each lesson, an instructor can create a brief one-to-two-minute video clip as a preview to the chapter, explaining a concept or illustrating some idea to arouse students’ attention. These brief introductions can encourage students to activate prior learning and can predict what a reading selection may be about. The brief video clip provides students with both visual and auditory tools that stimulate activation of memories on both cognitive and affective levels (Medina, 2008). Students can view the video more than once and create an overall mental framework of the

chapter they are to read. This mental outline helps them to see how major ideas are connected and serves as a guide as they read (McWhorter, 2009).

Narrated PowerPoints

To accompany brief video clips in an online course, an instructor can also narrate PowerPoints with colorful graphics, another visual/auditory way to prepare students for a reading assignment. This pre-reading encourages them to predict, note, and reflect on the organization and content of a chapter or article (McWhorter, 2009). In so doing, they are developing metacognitive strategies. Furthermore, the use of narration is another example of teacher immediacy as the students can hear the instructor's voice and become more familiar with the person behind it through the tone, inflections, accent, and other auditory cues and identifiers. This is a form of projecting social presence to connect with students (Johnson and Card, 2007).

Electronic Flashcards

Since intensive vocabulary study is an essential part of a developmental reading course, providing electronic flashcards with the instructor's auditory pronunciation of each word is also helpful to online reading students. In a face-to-face classroom, students have the advantage of hearing an instructor pronounce new vocabulary words each week. In order to simulate that advantage in an online "classroom," instructors can create electronic flashcards that allow students to look at each vocabulary word, listen to its pronunciation, predict the definition, and then click the "flip over" button to confirm their definition. Both visual and auditory tools help reinforce word definitions and provide "maintenance rehearsal," repetitive review for retention (Lefton & Brannon, 2009, p. 329). Since this electronic learning technique focuses on drill and practice, a behaviorally active strategy, but not on deeper levels of meaning, students can make semantic maps of words to promote fuller understanding of both the denotative and connotative meanings of words. When students connect words to associations, they are cognitively active (Mayer, 1999) and are more likely to make sense out of word meaning. This kind

of cognitive strategy is one way to create a memory link for later retrieval (Lefton & Brannon, 2009).

Camtasia/On-screen Video Recorder

Use of the Web tool Camtasia provides instructors with a way to make their own tutorials for students that explain how to navigate some aspects of an online course or to complete various activities throughout the semester. This software allows the instructor, to produce a downloadable video with audio. For example, an instructor can use this visual/auditory method to give students a "Course Tour" the first day of class and later to show them the kinesthetic technique of annotating a passage effectively.

The Discussion Board

Online classes often include a discussion board, a tool that allows students to post comments about a topic and to interact with each other. Discussion boards give students the opportunity to see the comments of other students, allowing them to react to, agree with, or confirm what others post. As a pre-activity each week in an online developmental reading class, instructors can ask students to predict what a particular article will involve and post a question on the course discussion board about the week's topic. After students have read and annotated the article, they can return to the discussion board and post what they perceive to be the main idea of the article and react to any major or minor supporting details that particularly interested them, surprised them, or confirmed what they have experienced. The advantage of the discussion board is that it is an asynchronous, interactive tool and is open to the whole class. Developmental reading classes tend to be small—usually under 20 students making discussion boards an ideal forum for the exchange of ideas. However, instructors of larger classes can also create a number of small groups, all assigned to their own discussion boards.

Collaborative Groups and Interdependent Learning

A "wiki" is an online collaborative space where students can view and edit each other's work. This type of Web tool allows

students to complete assignments together in an asynchronous way so that their schedules do not interfere with this type of peer interaction. To promote collaboration, an instructor could assign students in each group an activity that involves multiple levels of thinking. Group members choose the part of the assignment they want to work on. For example, a vocabulary assignment can involve researching a word's origin (etymology), connotative and denotative meaning (semantics), word structure (morphology), and the word's role in a sentence (syntax). Group members enter the wiki and choose from a chart one of these linguistic aspects to complete. They add and edit their information in the wiki. All parts of the assignment need to be completed; those who enter the wiki first have first choice of what part of the assignment to complete. On the due date, the instructor can view the entire completed assignment in which each group member has participated. Another example of peers working together involves students collaborating to write a paragraph using vocabulary words they are studying on a topic of their choice. In the paragraph, each group is responsible for providing context clues to indicate meaning.

The Online Class Blog

The online class blog provides students with a chance to share their thoughts about something they have read or can serve as an outlet for them to describe some of their problems with comprehending the reading material in another course. Students can also use this tool to express ways they have used the skills and techniques from their reading course in their other courses. Doing so involves transfer of knowledge by use of constructivist strategies (Mayer 1999). For example, students can share a reading technique or strategy that has been useful to them in another class, a strategy that didn't seem effective for a particular reading assignment, or vocabulary words from their reading course discovered in other contexts.

Interaction with the Instructor: Email, Chat, Video Conferencing

Instructors can encourage students to use the course management system's email to ask them questions or to seek more

extensive explanations than those provided in their textbook or online directions. However if online students need more immediate one-on-one interaction, using synchronous video conferencing tools, such as the popular Skype (Skype.com) and Elluminate, is a readily available option. From this writer's experience as an instructor of both online and face-to-face classes, it is possible to experience the same amount of interaction with online students as one can experience with students in traditional settings. In fact, the very nature of an online course may require more teacher/student communication as each party has to participate to create social presence.

Consistent Content Organizational Patterns

Online teaching can create a predictable and consistent way for developmental students to learn. Weekly modules in the course "content map" can be developed so that there is a definite pattern for learning objectives and outcomes. Employing an effective, consistent learning pattern, an instructor might ask students to do the following each week: (a) view a brief video clip that introduces a concept in a textbook chapter; (b) view the narrated PowerPoint that focuses on that concept and which provides specific examples; (c) read the assigned chapter or article while annotating; (d) review the main points of the article and create an electronic concept map, a visual way to organize main ideas by using mind mapping software; (e) answer comprehension questions and get immediate automated electronic feedback; and (f) transfer these specific skills to the reading and analysis of another article, which also includes creating a mind map that summarizes the main idea and supporting details.

Overall, students can be in charge of their own learning through a course management system, such as D2L. Online the instructor plays the role of mentor and "scaffolder," guiding and supporting students to become more independent learners by giving them personal feedback on a regular basis as they interact with course materials (Rasmussen, 2001). In addition, the electronic grade book tool allows students ongoing access to their daily grade average in the course. By clicking "Grades" on the course page navigation bar, they see not only their grades for each assignment

but also their grade average on a daily/weekly basis. Incorporating these activity patterns each week gives developmental students a sense of control and prediction regarding their learning and the ability to see their own progress in a consistent way.

The Virtual Reading Lab

Students can be linked to an online textbook companion (virtual reading lab) that provides further vocabulary practice and reading comprehension exercises. For example, after students study the topic of inferential thinking in the textbook or e-textbook, they can then practice this important skill through the textbook companion virtual lab exercises. These online practices reinforce the textbook lesson and also provide electronic grading and feedback to students. Once students have satisfactorily passed a number of exercises, mastery tests are available for them in the “lab” to complete and they are a further means of providing automatic feedback in the form of an explanation of each answer. Students can see progress first-hand and know immediately if they need to return to their textbook for further explanation and practice.

Self-evaluations

At the beginning of a spring 2009 online reading course, this writer asked students (N = 15) to informally identify their approach to academic reading by referring them to Kathleen McWhorter’s (2005) list of active and passive reading behaviors. These active reading behaviors include specific strategies that are employed before, during, and after the reading of an assignment whereas passive reading behaviors do not involve interaction with the text before during or after the reading process. After reviewing this comparison of reading approaches, the majority of students indicated that they were more passive than active readers (Table 1). By the end of the semester in a final self-evaluation that asked the open-ended question, “Are you an active or passive reader?” all (N = 15) of the students rated themselves as more active readers than passive ones.

Table 1

Open-ended Question: Are you an Active or Passive Reader?

Reading Approach	Active	Passive	Mixed
Beginning of course	N = 2	N = 11	N = 2
End of Course	N = 15	N = 0	N = 0

These students were asked to support their answers with explanatory details. Their self-reports indicated that the specific strategies they had practiced throughout the course gave them the metacognitive tools to read more effectively, thereby making them more confident readers.

Conclusion

In teaching a fully online *Reading for College Success* course for the past seven semesters, this writer found by reviewing student self-evaluations, the course evaluations completed by students, and final grades that those students who opt to stay in the cyberspace classroom can develop into independent, active, efficient learners with improved reading comprehension skills. These students learn to self-regulate by using a “toolbox” of strategies that they can, in turn, use in reading assignments for all of their other classes.

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A Tale of Two Adult Learners: From Adult Basic Education to Degree Completion

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This action research study sought to understand what contributed to the success of two adult learners who had previously been left behind by the educational system. The findings revealed the importance of supportive educators, as well as a personal support system. In addition, their participation in this study was an empowering experience for the students.

Several years ago, two women, embarked on a similar course. Marie, a single mother of three, living in the United Kingdom, ended her formal education at the age of fifteen. Cynthia, a married mother of two, living in the United States, formally dropped out of high school at the age of 16. Both struggled with basic academic skills. In spite of these barriers, both women enrolled in educational programs to enhance their skills. This led to a transformation of both of their lives.

After losing her job and having her relationship break down several months later, Marie found herself receiving public benefits, depressed, and struggling to make ends meet. Her motivation to enroll in an adult computer literacy course was the Additional Loan Parent Benefit, an initiative from the British government to encourage participants to engage in education to enhance their employment marketability. Similarly, Cynthia decided to complete her General Education Development (GED) exam to be able to take a sign language course at her local community college which she could not attend without a high school diploma. Although most students do not complete formal university studies after literacy and GED programs, Marie and Cynthia did continue their education. Marie completed an adult nursing diploma program in March 2009. She works as a hospital nurse. Cynthia recently completed her bachelor's degree in Applied Behavioral Sciences from an adult accelerated program. She is a certified addictions counselor, and is taking coursework towards her master's degree in counseling. In

spite of all the odds being stacked against them, Marie and Cynthia are now educated and confident women.

Marie and Cynthia's success begs the question of how educators can support their marginalized students, who come into programs lacking not only basic academic skills, but also a belief in their abilities and low self-esteem. Upon meeting at the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning in Stirling, Scotland in the summer of 2007, two collegiate educators, Vickie and Carrie, found themselves discussing this question at length. In order to begin to understand the questions they were asking themselves, Vicky and Carrie introduced two of their students, Marie and Cynthia, connecting them online to share their learning journeys with each other. It is this communication that provides the data for the study.

Methodology

Action research is a method in which the participants examine their educational practice strategically by using research techniques (Ferrance, 2000). Participatory action research (PAR) has emerged in recent years as an approach which strives for both social transformation and "consciousness raising" (Freire, 2000) among the underprivileged and minorities, where an ever growing underclass is accepted as the norm. The "underclass" is cut off from the mainstream working class and left behind (Clarke, 2002). As is the case with many persons in these groups, being labeled poor and struggling in school had impacted Marie and Cynthia's self esteem.

At the core of this study, is the fact that the students were not simply participants. They were co-researchers with the adult educators, guiding the study through their email communication and discussions at a conference they attended with their faculty mentors, Vicky and Carrie. The online conversation was open-ended and developed completely by the students. Vicky met in person with Marie and Carrie and Cynthia also met throughout the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action learning project was for the educators to gain in-depth knowledge from two students who

beat the odds by being highly successful in their academic pursuits as non-traditional adult learners. This information can assist adult educators in transitioning marginalized adult students from basic skills courses into post-secondary education.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What led the learners to continue their studies beyond the original program they enrolled in?
2. What advice do the learners have for educators who serve adult students with previous educational experiences similar to their own?

Background Literature

This section provides a brief overview of policies that have influenced the changing face of Skills for Life (SfL) in Britain. It also presents information on the GED exam in the U.S., and its impact on participants' transition into university education.

Literacy Education in Britain

Adult literacy, language, and numeracy learning has moved from being considered a fringe activity within the field of adult education to holding a central and pivotal role in England. The British government has given priority in successive policy initiatives to tackling the extent of low literacy, numeracy and language skills in the adult population. SfL is considered essential to improving the skills level and therefore the performance of the UK economy (HM Treasury, 2006).

A review of the literacy and numeracy capabilities of the adult workforce in England, reported that as many as seven million adults in England had literacy and numeracy needs. In response to these findings the SfL strategy (DfEE, 2001) was launched in March 2001. Priority groups were unemployed adults and others receiving benefits. The goal was to increase the skills and employability of these target groups. The purpose of this initiative was not, however, to prepare the participants for university education.

GED Completion

Introduced in the 1940s, the General Education Development (GED) exams were a means for World War II veterans to complete their

high school education. The GED consists of five exams including reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. In order to earn a GED, students are required to pass all five sections (Boesel, Alsalam, & Smith, 1998; Tokpah & Padak, 2003). Currently, five percent of all first-year college students in the United States are GED recipients (Tokpah & Padak, 2003).

When comparisons were made between GED degree recipients and high school students, similar scores on the five tests were earned by GED recipients and high school seniors (Boesel, Alsalam, & Smith, 1998). In spite of these test scores, research suggests the skills of the GED holders' are not comparable to those of high school graduates. One possible reason is that GED holders might lack the in-depth knowledge and skills needed in post-secondary education due to a shorter period of instruction than those earning a high school diploma. Support for this idea can be found in a study of students entering two-year colleges which discovered that more GED recipients than high school graduates were placed in developmental reading, English, and math courses (Brown, 2000).

In 2000, 66 percent of those taking the GED exam indicated that they were planning to continue their education. However, only 30 to 35 percent of those who passed the exam actually obtained any post-secondary education, and only five to ten percent completed at least a year of post-secondary education (Tyler, 2001). The discrepancy between those wishing to complete a college education and those actually doing so is cause for concern.

Since learners frequently have difficulty transitioning from literacy education and GED programs into higher education, the cases of Marie and Cynthia, described above, are somewhat unique. They are positive examples of the kind of success such programs can lead to. Their experiences might be duplicated more frequently if we know what contributed to their academic success.

Findings

The email communication provided the two collegiate educators with critical information to support and enhance their practice. This section summarizes the dialogue between Marie and Cynthia as it relates to the original research questions.

What led Marie and Cynthia to continue their studies beyond the original program?

Marie and Cynthia both discussed the importance of their teachers. When talking about her first computer teacher, Bill, Marie explained how important it was that he never talked down to her. She explained how she frequently struggled with the computer classes, but rather than dismissing her as a failure, Bill persevered and encouraged her to continue the course remarking, "I've got to hand it to you Marie, you keep coming back to class no matter how much you struggle; you're very determined."

Marie later met Vicky, her literacy tutor. Vicky's support went beyond the classroom. At the time that Marie was studying with Vicky, Vicky began her doctoral research and asked for volunteers willing to take part in her study. Marie became part of Vicky's participatory action research group. Vicky worked with Marie and other members of the group to facilitate the participants working together in an egalitarian way, engaging in negotiations and developing solutions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2000) to create a curriculum that met their needs and would be a model for future learners. When asked why she chose to take part in study, Marie said, "I could not say no to Vicky. She always took a personal interest in me. It made me feel good." As a participant in the study, Marie started meeting with Vicky at the college where the basic skills courses were offered. They later met off-campus to put them on equal ground. Vicky did not wish to be in a position of power. Marie credits this relationship with Vicky as the motivating factor of her continuing her education.

Vicky inspired me with my education as she always told me that I could do it; she made me believe that I could do something with my life. Before I used to think that what you were dealt in your life was your lot; she made me see that this is not true. Life is what you make it. Vicky believed in me and helped me to believe in myself.

Over the course of the four-year study, Marie and Vicky developed a personal relationship based on mutual respect. Vicky recalls that when Marie began class, she sat in the back and would not look anyone in the eye. Learners who attend adult literacy classes often have to overcome significant barriers to gain the confidence and courage to return to learning, in some cases bringing with them "fear of violence, threat and intimidation" (Barton & Hamilton, 2007, p.165). Even when learners have been in vulnerable situations, facing domestic violence or other social or emotional difficulties, adult literacy education can often be a critical space to support and empower them to take agency, no matter what their educational trajectory. Learners' stories, poetry and images were used as foils to represent the generative themes in the lives of the learners that attended the literacy classes. On progressing from the

literacy education course and beginning university study, Marie wrote an easy read autobiography. It looked at the motivation for returning to education (McNamara, 2007).

Marie's story is used with current students to open up a dialogue with learners to explore experiences of violence, poverty and illiteracy, which many learners face, and how these problems can be addressed. To support the use of the easy read autobiography assignment with other learners, holistic resources (Duckworth, 2008) were developed. The resources encourage learners to consider their own life situation, their hopes for the future and aims to help them identify a series of actions they can take towards achieving their goals. Together with using these holistic resources, previous students who had overcome similar barriers visit the class to serve as role models to encourage the learners to reach their potential.

Marie points out that after changing her self-perception and realizing that she could turn her life around, it was important for her to have "some good people in it." Before meeting Vicky, Marie had no support system. Vicky's role went beyond classroom teacher. Marie explained how Vicky always made her focus on the things she did well, rather than her weak academic skills. Vicky would complement her on her parenting skills, home decorating and gardening. This helped Marie realize that she had skills to offer others.

Like Marie, Cynthia had instructors who inspired her, but she also had the support of her husband and friends. Explaining her initial experience in higher education, Cynthia states:

At first, when I began my class, I felt embarrassed, inadequate, stupid, no confidence, ashamed, and thought there was something wrong with me because I could not write a school paper for a class requirement. A lawyer friend of mine helped me to write a couple of paragraphs to begin my first research paper that was extremely difficult for me. I had written so few papers in junior high and high school.

Thinking about her instructors, Cindy states, "I recall my teachers, and there were many that were patient and understanding that I was an older student (46 years old) returning to school after 30 years." She had one teacher at the community college who told her she would be a good counselor. When Cynthia inquired how she knew this, she called her "a diamond in the rough." This was a powerful comment to Cynthia, giving her confidence in her potential. After transferring from the community college to a university, Cynthia met Carrie. Carrie had recently completed

her doctoral degree when she taught one of Cynthia's classes. Cynthia was inspired by Carrie's story, and started thinking about continuing her education, and possibly earning a doctorate as well. She recalls, "I remember Carrie saying 'set the bar a little higher.' At that time I did not even know I would be capable of striving to reach for more, but now I do."

While Marie and Cynthia entered adult education with disadvantages, they both learned to take advantage of the opportunities that were presented to them. Marie found that in Vicky, who went from being her teacher to being a role model, confidante, and friend. Cynthia encountered many people who encouraged her. Unlike Marie, Cynthia had support from her husband and a few close friends. She also discovered classmates and teachers who supported her in her educational journey.

Both women were fragile when they started their coursework. They lacked self-confidence and questioned their ability to succeed in learning new skills and information. Marie and Cynthia attribute initial success in their new learning environments and support from teachers as the reason they continued their education. In addition, they both found their learning experiences personally meaningful. They were able to use and apply the information they gained from the coursework. This immediate application, combined with a supportive learning environment, gave them the motivation and confidence to continue their studies.

What advice do Marie and Cynthia have for educators who work with students with previous educational experiences similar to their own?

"If it had been a teacher I was used to as a child I would have walked out. He never made me feel fake. He was always happy to repeat things without rolling his eyes or giving the look," says Marie speaking about Bill, the first teacher she had when she entered the literacy program. Marie's words are powerful. As an adult learner, she feared the classroom. Her childhood memories caused a great deal of anxiety for her and Bill's patience and support kept her coming back. Marie lacked a social network that supported her in her education. As a single mother of three, she rarely had someone encouraging and cheering her on. Vicky provided her with that.

One of the things that Cynthia appreciated about her educational experience was realizing she was capable of learning more than she expected. Cynthia did not meet Carrie until her senior year of college. Even at that point, she still struggled as a learner, especially with writing. She states, "You [Carrie] told me I could gradually set the bar higher and I am grateful for you planting the seed that I can reach beyond and improve."

Learners such as Marie and Cynthia often have to unlearn messages from their past. What they are telling us is that educators can and should help learners let go of their educational pasts. This effort might need to take place outside of the classroom in a neutral setting. Sometimes teaching might also include un-teaching and helping the learner break free of their past perceptions regarding their inability to learn.

As educators, our words and actions are more powerful than we sometimes realize. For example, Cynthia repeatedly mentioned Carrie teaching her she could “raise the bar.” This was a statement Carrie made in the classroom, never realizing the impact it might have on a student. It is also significant to realize that previous experiences lead some learners to construct different meanings from the same words. We need to be sensitive and in tune to what we say and how we say it.

Although the information gained from Marie and Cynthia’s online dialogue is useful to the practice of adult education for marginalized adult learners, the conversation did not end with the online communication. The most significant event that transpired as a result of this study was the award of an international scholarship from the Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA), providing the opportunity for Marie and Vicky to attend their 2008 annual conference in Mobile, AL. This provided Marie and Cynthia the opportunity to meet. In addition, they co-presented a session with Vicky and Carrie to the other adult educators attending the conference. This created a critical space for consciousness raising or conscientization (Freire, 2000). Additionally, it provided each of the conference delegates who attended their session an opportunity to question their assumptions about adult learners, providing a critical inquiry of their pre-conceived ideas. This was an empowering and transformative (Mezirow, 1991) experience for the students and their faculty mentors. The following section provides information about the conference experience and its impact on Marie and Cynthia, as well as Vicky, Carrie, and some of the conference participants.

Engaging in the Critical Dialogue

After being at the conference for a day and a half, the four presenters sat together to discuss how they would approach the presentation that was scheduled for the following day. Marie quickly volunteered, “I am willing to answer any question.” From that comment, it was decided that Carrie and Vicky would begin the session by explaining how the four of them had come together.

Marie began by telling the participants that she returned to school for personal reasons and one of the participants asked if she could inquire what those reasons were. This simple question led her to relax and share

her story. The room was set up in a circle, with the four presenters seated at the front. Marie and Cynthia both stated that this circle made them feel as if they were engaging in an informal conversation. Marie elaborated, “I felt more confident [sitting]. I did not have to stand up and answer questions about me. You are high ranking doctors, teachers, and I did not feel a hierarchy. We were all on one level.” She also stated that knowing Cynthia also helped her. They knew they were in this together.

Cynthia had similar feelings about the experience. She explained, I was happy to sit down for a presentation with Marie. It was less intimidating, and I was calmer, more able to be myself, and comfortable. I was delighted to have the experience to get to know Marie and felt I could identify with our common backgrounds, limitations, struggles, and determination to succeed with all the obstacles in our way.

It was interesting for the faculty mentors to observe Marie and Cynthia during the presentation. They thwarted the agenda and began asking the delegates questions. We could visibly see the change and confidence that was developed during the presentation. By asserting themselves and asking the participants questions, the students took the power in this situation. They became self-confident and articulated their experiences clearly and openly. They provided the session attendees with practical information to assist them as educators when working with similar students. This is something that neither Vicky nor Carrie could have imagined when first meeting Marie and Cynthia. Comments from Marie and Cynthia, along with observing them together at the conference, demonstrated how significant they had become to each other. Their online communication had provided them with mutual support during their studies and led to mutual respect. The two learners openly shared their challenges with each other throughout the presentation and provided each other with unconditional support. Even prior to meeting, Marie and Cynthia had broadened their support network to include each other. In fact, well over a year after meeting, they continue to email each other.

Conclusion

This action research project had a life-changing impact on each of participants. Cynthia and Marie helped Vicky and Carrie become aware of how their actions and attitudes might be perceived by their students. Since Marie and Cynthia had returned to education feeling vulnerable and fragile, they needed to overcome their fears about returning to the classroom. Each identified with instructors who made them feel good

about themselves and stated that they were pleased to find their teachers emphasized the positive rather than the negative.

By sharing their experiences, Marie and Cynthia reminded Carrie and Vicky of some very important aspects of their roles as educators. Although the power relationship between teacher and student naturally exists in a formal classroom setting, such power should never equate to oppression. Cynthia emphasized,

I will say to become better teachers be an inspiration, a good educational role model, have empathy, patience, humility, and a genuine concern for students, and please never give up on them; their greatest work is yet to come. Sometimes a teacher may not just develop reading or writing skills; you are developing a person who might not have been in an educational or classroom environment for a very long time and it could be new for them.

We have a great deal of power as educators. We have the power to support and nurture; we have the power to suppress and control. Although Vickie and Carrie were aware of this prior to this study, this experience illuminated this for them. Our words and actions can provide encouragement to our students. They can also add to any insecurity that already exists within the learner.

As we work with our students, we must always show them respect. This respect includes taking an interest in their lives and listening to them. Although students often come to us with academic challenges, they each have life skills that should be acknowledged. For example, when Vicky complimented Marie on her decorating and gardening skills, this increased Marie's self-esteem. This transferred to Marie as a learner. By realizing that she had talents her teacher admired, Marie began to see herself as someone with potential to be successful in other areas. Similarly, Cynthia was encouraged by an instructor who called her "a diamond in the rough." Having someone see her promise helped Cynthia believe in herself.

Many adult learners have not had previous success in formal educational settings. They often fear that they will fail once again. Educators who are encouraging, and acknowledge the learner's talents can help their students overcome their fear of failure and move them forward educationally.

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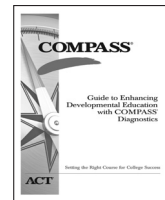
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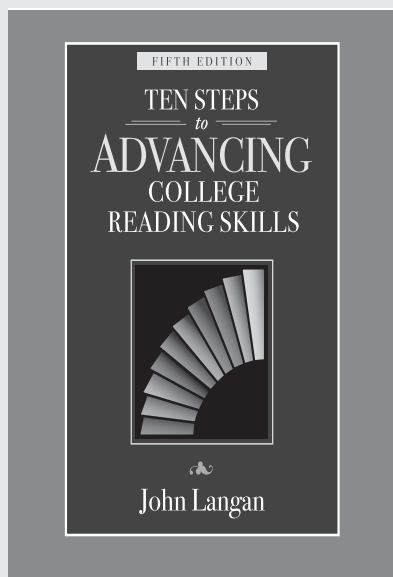


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Full Page	4 x 7	\$500	\$800
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Issue	Mailed	Reservation Date	Camera Ready
Spring	April 15	October 1	November 1
Fall	November 1	May 1	June 15

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Payment is due with space reservation. All checks should be made payable to NADE and must be received prior to the space reservation date of each issue. Send payment to NADE, Attn: NADE Digest Ads, 500 N. Estrella Parkway, Ste B2 PMB 412, Goodyear, AZ 85338. Send camera-ready files in .eps or .tif format to Digest Editor office@nade.net.

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