RESEARCH IN DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

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Developmental Education: Then and Now

By Brian V. Cafarella

The postsecondary discipline of developmental education is high on the radar for college officials and state legislators. According to Boylan and Bonham (2007), "Developmental Education refers to a broad range of courses and services organized and delivered in an effort to retain students and ensure the successful completion of their postsecondary goals" (p. 2). The current beliefs espoused toward developmental education are primarily negative. Brothen and Wambach (2004) asserted that "dissatisfaction with student success has caused a crisis in developmental education. Critics from both inside and outside the field question whether remedial courses really prepare students for future college work or even if they are properly part of the college mission" (p. 34). However, many individuals lack a basic understanding of the history of developmental education and how it compares and contrasts with discipline's present state. This article will provide an overview of the history of developmental education. Next, some of the issues affecting the current state of the discipline will be explored. Then, developmental education's past and present will be compared and contrasted. Lastly, some questions and final thoughts that pertain to the future of developmental education will be posed.

An Historical Overview of Developmental Education

The practice of developmental education can be traced back to the birth of American higher education. Institutions of higher education have been serving underprepared students since Harvard opened its doors in 1636. In the 17th century, most instruction was delivered in Latin, and most textbooks were only available in Latin. This was because Harvard followed the European model of education, wherein Latin was the language of instruction. Scholarly works were only available in Latin (Boylan & White, 1987). According to Boylan and White (1987), "the learning of an academic language was not a high priority for colonists attempting to carve a homeland in the wilderness" (p. 3). As a result, many students entered Harvard College underprepared. For students to be successful in their studies, they needed to understand Latin. Harvard College began to provide tutors in Latin for these underprepared students. Tutors were typically young men who had recently received a baccalaureate degree and were preparing for a career in the ministry. Tutors were generally with their students throughout the day as they ate in the same dining halls and slept in the same chamber (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). In the 17th and 18th century, programs for underprepared students were simply labeled "tutoring" (Arendale, 2002).

Brubacher and Rudy (1976) conveyed that after the American Revolution, college course instruction and literature were generally in English; however, the need for remediation continued into the 19th century as more colleges continued to open and incoming students were deficient in basic skills. It is notable that there were no universal college entrance requirements until the late 19th century. According to Brubacher and Rudy (1976), colleges at that point in time were generally tuition-driven. Therefore, anyone who had the funds to attend college was able to do so without prior preparation. However, as college enrollments continued to grow, tutors were not able to meet the high demand of students in need of remediation as the number of young men who enrolled in college to enter the clergy diminished by the 19th century (Boylan & White, 1987). The University of Wisconsin established the nation's first formal college preparatory program in 1849. The program provided formal remedial courses in reading, writing, and arithmetic for students who lacked a sufficient background to succeed in their college courses (Brier, 1986). It is also noteworthy that by the mid-19th century, the label for programs serving underprepared students was no longer tutoring. Colleges referred to such programs as pre-collegiate, college preparatory, and remedial (Arendale, 2002). The need for remedial education grew in the late 19th century as higher education continued to expand. Therefore other colleges began to adopt the model from the University of Wisconsin, and by the late 19th century, more than 80% of the colleges and universities in the United States offered college preparatory programs (Brier, 1986).

In an attempt to raise academic standards and reduce the amount of college preparatory courses offered, the College Entrance Examination Board was established in 1890. Many students were still not college ready; therefore, colleges and universities continued to offer college preparatory courses. However, four-year colleges and universities did begin to reduce the number of college preparatory courses offered as junior colleges emerged (Boylan,

1988). The purpose of a junior college was to provide students with a liberal arts preparation prior to enrolling in a bachelor's degree program at a 4-year college or university. Consequently, junior colleges offered remedial classes, and by 1940, 11% of all college students were enrolled in junior colleges (Geiger, 2005).

In 1944, the U.S. Government passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, also known as the G.I. Bill of Rights. The government was concerned about the millions of veterans who were returning to potential unemployment, and therefore, allotted millions of dollars for the education and training of these war veterans (Thelin, 2004). Overall, several million returning American war veterans from World War II used the G.I. Bill to enroll in college (Olson, 1974). As a result, colleges provided a greater variety of study skills and reading classes to accommodate the needs of veterans.

Programs for underprepared students expanded in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Boylan (1988) claimed that at that point in time, colleges were referring to these programs as developmental, remedial, and learning assistance. More specifically, by the early 1970s the term "developmental education" was coined and was becoming more widely utilized as there was an increased focus on student development (Arendale, 2002; Boylan & Bonham, 2007). Public community colleges, which were open access and offered a variety of remedial courses, opened at a rate of one per week between 1965 and 1972 (Geiger, 2005). This resulted in part from the Higher Education Act of 1965, which stemmed from President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty (Gladieux, King, & Corrigan, 2005). The nation began to focus on the poor and underserved (Boylan, 1988). The government provided need-based aid for minorities and others who had been previously underrepresented in higher education. Community and junior colleges greatly expanded their efforts to provide developmental education to all students. However, at this point, private junior colleges were losing ground to open admissions community colleges. It is worth noting that at that point in time, there was no evidence that colleges were held accountable for the success rates of developmental students. Colleges were simply granted funding for every full-time equivalent (FTE). An FTE refers to each grouping of full-time course work credit per each academic semester or quarter (Weisbrod, Ballou, & Asch, 2008).

During the 1970s and 1980s developmental education gained recognition as an academic discipline. In 1976, the National Center for Developmental Education (NCDE) was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Spann, 1996). In 1980, the NCDE established the Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators. This was the nation's first professional development and certification program specifically for developmental educators (Spann, 1996). Boylan and Bonham (2007) reported that in 1984, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published its first report on developmental education. This was important as the U.S. Department of Education was finally acknowledging that developmental courses were significant enough to include in national research. Boylan and Bonham (2007) also mentioned that during the 1970s and 1980s the NCDE launched publications such as the *Journal of Developmental Education* and *Research in Developmental Education*. Also, in 1986, the nation's first doctoral program in developmental education was established at Grambling State University in Louisiana.

The recognition of developmental education continued to grow throughout the 1990s and into the next millennium. In 1990, the first national study of developmental education was conducted by the NCDE. The study gathered information from over 5,000 students from 120 institutions of higher education. Researchers identified relationships among methods, courses, services, organizational structures, and student outcomes (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997). Boylan and Bonham (2007) stated that, "this study made a major contribution to improving practices in the field and enhancing the professionalism of developmental educators" (p. 3). Developmental education continued to surge at the turn of the 21st century. According to the NCES, developmental courses were offered at 98% of the nation's community colleges and 80% of the nation's public, four-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Developmental Education in the 21st Century

Early in the first decade of the 21st century, developmental education received increasingly portentous attention from state legislators and college leaders. This was due to the large numbers of students who placed into developmental courses. In 2006, Noel-Levitz reported that nationally, 75% of all community college students enroll in at least one developmental course. State legislators have also expressed increasing frustration with the number of students who do not pass and must repeat their developmental courses, which results in more developmental courses that must be offered. Moreover, much debate has focused on the cost of developmental education. Roueche and Waiwaiole (2009) reported that the annual cost of developmental education in community colleges is between $1.9 billion and $2.4 billion. However, Saxon and Boylan (2001) argued that the overall cost of remediation to the states is relatively small as it accounts for less than 10% of the entire cost of higher education, and in many states the cost of the discipline accounts for less than 2% of the full cost of higher education.

The success rates and high enrollment in developmental education have given developmental education ominous attention. Bahr (2008) pointed out that many have argued that taxpayers should not have to pay so much for students to learn the same material twice since all of the material in developmental mathematics, reading, and English is covered in elementary or high school. Weisbrod, Ballou, and Asch (2008) asserted that many states have begun to impose funding formulas on public institutions of higher education. More specifically, schools need to show higher success and retention rates to receive more funding. Therefore, to continue to receive adequate state funding, community colleges must explore ways to improve student success rates in developmental classes and higher overall college completion rates.

College leaders and state legislators have implemented various national initiatives to mend the state of developmental education. In 2003 the Lumina Foundation, a private Indianapolis-based group, united with several other private foundations such as the W.K. Kellogg

Foundation, the Boston Foundation, and the Knowledge Works to start an initiative to improve education in community colleges. The initiative was named "Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count" (Ashburn, 2007). Immerwahr and Friedman (2005) wrote that Achieving the Dream focuses on enhancing the "achievement of community college students, especially those facing the greatest obstacles" (p. 2). Achieving the Dream provides support to low-income students and students of color. Colleges that participate in Achieving the Dream examine their data and success rates and identify gaps and areas that need improvement.

The Gates Foundation has also become involved in improving developmental education. Melinda Gates, co-chairman of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has reported pledging $110 million to improve and develop groundbreaking models for developmental education (Ashburn, 2007). Two major grants have stemmed from the Gates Foundation's focus on improving developmental education: the Developmental Education Initiative and Completion by Design. One goal of Completion by Design is to accelerate and compress developmental education courses. In other words, college officials wish to minimize the amount of time needed for students to progress through their developmental courses as well as minimize the number of student credit hours devoted to developmental education. Edgecombe (2011) clarified that acceleration involves the reorganization of instruction and curricula in ways that expedite the completion of coursework or credentials. Compressed courses condense the content from multiple courses into one. Acceleration is similar to compression; however, in acceleration students can complete the required material in less than one semester or quarter. Acceleration usually involves classes that are self-paced in a lab setting. Students meet their requirements when they have completed their work. Accelerated and compressed courses have been encouraged by the Gates Foundation in an effort to improve student completion rates (Collins, 2011; Killough, 2009).

The increased employment of compression and acceleration stems from concern that developmental course sequences, especially developmental mathematics, are too long. More specifically, Edgecombe (2011) cites mounting evidence suggesting that the traditional sequence of developmental mathematics courses hinders community college students from entering college level courses. This evidence is based on Bailey, Jeong, and Cho's (2010) findings that only 33% of students referred to developmental mathematics courses complete their required course work within three years, and only 17% of students successfully complete a developmental mathematics course sequence of three courses or more. This study included a sample of over 250,000 students from 57 different community colleges in seven states. Boylan (2002), however, has warned that students should be screened prior to entering compressed or accelerated courses to determine if they are candidates for such intensive instruction.

Currently, some institutions are moving toward removing the requirement for mandatory remediation. According to O'Connor (2013), the state of Florida is seeking to make developmental courses optional for students. For example, at Hillsboro Community College, incoming students will still take a placement exam. However, if these students are deficient in mandatory skills for college-level courses, they can simply enroll in an individualized program to remedy such skills. Moreover, they can remedy these skills or take optional developmental courses while completing in their college-level courses.

It is also noteworthy that as the 21st century has progressed, developmental education has become an endangered species at many four-year colleges and universities. Jacobs (2012) cited that since 2007, more than a dozen states have restricted funding for developmental education at four-year institutions. Arendale (2001) claimed that many officials believe that developmental education is simply too costly and furthermore can water down the standards of a four-year college or university. Jacobs (2012) further revealed that students who place into developmental courses in a four-year college or university are referred to or will be referred to community colleges. Since community colleges have traditionally served underprepared students, many officials believe that community colleges are a better fit for developmental students (Bettinger & Long, 2004).

Comparisons and Contrasts between the Past and Present

Overall Attitudes toward Developmental Education: Past and Present

It is evident that some state legislators and college leaders are searching for methods to minimize or even eliminate developmental education. History has shown that higher education officials have attempted to eliminate developmental education in the past. While higher education has been serving underprepared students since its inception, developmental or remedial education was not even acknowledged as a postsecondary discipline for over 200 years. It was not until the numbers of underprepared students greatly exceeded the availability of traditional tutors that higher education began to offer formal education for underprepared students. Toward the end of the 19th century, higher education officials implemented the College Entrance Board Examination. However, incoming students were still underprepared, and the expectation became that junior colleges would take on an increased role of offering developmental courses. In summation, for more than 300 years, higher education either refused to acknowledge developmental education as a postsecondary academic discipline or attempted to eliminate the need for the subject. The actions of current college leaders and state legislators mirror those prior movements.

Measures of Success: Past and Present

There is a sharp contrast in how college leaders and state legislators measure success in developmental education in the present day from that of their counterparts forty to fifty years ago. Developmental education began to expand in the 1960's as the government and higher education focused on serving the underprepared student. Open-enrollment community colleges opened at a precipitous rate. Success, therefore, seemed to be measured based on the number of underprepared students that were served. There was no focus on student success or

retention rates. However, over time the discipline of developmental education became caught in a paradigm shift. State legislators began to hold colleges accountable for the student success and completion rates. Moreover, legislators and higher education officials have balked at the high number of developmental classes that are offered and have questioned overall the need for the discipline. One policy remains unchanged; community colleges are still open access. However, it seems that developmental education success may now be evaluated by some according to how quickly students accelerate through their developmental courses. This modern day contrast with the past has certainly contributed to the current turmoil in developmental education.

Decisions Regarding Developmental Education: Past and Present

Another sharp contrast within developmental education's past and present relates to the decision-making process regarding the discipline. Prior to the 21st century, decisions regarding the format and curriculum of developmental education were made inside each institution of higher education. These decisions were also based on faculty expertise and research conducted in the field. However, as the 21st century has progressed, decisions regarding developmental education have fallen into the hands of external entities such as state legislators and other peripheral organizations such as Lumina and the Gates Foundation. Political pressure to accelerate students through their developmental course sequence and reduce the overall cost of developmental education has become the driving force within the discipline.

The Consistently Uncertain Path of Developmental Education

In examining the past and present of developmental education, a trend became apparent. College administrators and legislators have failed to establish long-term vision for the discipline of developmental education. Again, until the latter part of the 20th century, higher education attempted to ignore, eliminate, or simply banish the discipline to the junior college sector. In the later part of the 20th century, legislators acknowledged developmental education as a means to serve underprepared students. However, as the 21st century progressed, legislators and college leaders became concerned with success rates in developmental education. Their concern with success rates extended to college completion rates. Some lawmakers are presently focused on acceleration and, in the case of Florida, elimination of the discipline. There is limited evidence that accelerated courses are effective in certain applications (Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2014). However, the long term efficacy of these models is unproven and it is unlikely that these models will work for all developmental students. Though some models and applications show promise, redesign efforts in other situations appear to be quick fixes to appease political pressure. Therefore, longitudinal studies must be conducted to determine whether acceleration through developmental courses hinders or supports student success throughout their college career and even into their professional careers. Hopefully, the state of Florida's agenda to eliminate developmental education does not become a national trend. As we know from history, it is likely there will always be underprepared students that enroll in college. It is hard to imagine that students who place into developmental education can be successful without completing developmental course work in some form or fashion. In summation, it is evident that developmental education is in a state of flux, and experts within the field must study the discipline to determine the best course of action.

Concluding Comments

The future of developmental education is uncertain. Clearly the need for developmental education, a need that has existed for over three and a half centuries, is not waning. This is evident year after year from the relatively consistent percentages of students who place into developmental courses. It is apparent that legislators and college leaders must establish a long-term vision for developmental education; and this vision would be best informed by the research and recommendations of the scholars and practitioners within the discipline. The field of developmental education has a long history of serving students' needs with effective teaching and learning support. This should be the foremost concern going forward, rather than expedient administration of what may be viewed as a politically unpopular college service.

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