Basic Skills Education in Community Colleges

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The Basic Skills Research Project

- Origins
- Goals
  - Inside and Outside of Classrooms
- Investigating Teams
  - Research and Planning Group
  - UC-Berkeley School of Education
- Scope of Investigation
  - 20 community colleges
  - 323 interviews
  - 169 classroom observations
Four Key Findings

1. Pervasive Use of Remedial Pedagogy
2. Misalignment and Fragmentation of Educational Services
3. Islands of Innovation
4. The Need for Institutional Coherence
PERVASIVE USE OF REMEDIAL PEDAGOGY
Pervasive Use of Remedial Pedagogy

- Drill on basic sub-skills
- Part to whole instruction
- De-contextualized
- Little room for student performance
- Little room for student diagnostics
- Emphasis on the right answer and formal correctness
- Emphasis on rules, procedures, checklists
Pervasive Use of Remedial Pedagogy

- Tutoring
- Textbooks
- Computer-based instruction
- Student Services support programs
Remedial Pedagogy in Reading

- Less often taught despite real needs
- Part-to-whole skills:
  - Phonics
  - Dictionary skills
  - Study skills
  - Vocabulary
  - Reading skills
  - Comprehension skills
Remedial Pedagogy in Writing

- Punctuation and grammar
- Simple sentences and paragraphs
- Five paragraph essay
- The “research paper” focused on citation form
- Use of checklists
Non-Remedial Pedagogy in ESL

- Greater use of whole language methods interspersed with grammar, punctuation
- Whole-to-part instead of part-to-whole
- Emphasis on communicative competency, audience, purpose, student performance and interaction
Outcomes of Remedial Pedagogy

- Late arrivals and early leaving
- Inattention in class
- Texting and eating
- Sporadic homework
- Attendance dwindling over the semester
- High dropout rates
MISALIGNMENT AND FRAGMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
Misalignment and Fragmentation of Educational Services

- Assessment process
  - Incomprehensible and opaque
- Lack of horizontal alignment
- Lack of vertical alignment
- Student support services
  - Helping students get the right answers
  - Disconnected from instructional classrooms
  - Most “savvy” students use support services
  - Most students “don’t do optional”
Chaffey College as One Model

- Long haul
- Inclusive governance and innovation process
- All services for all students
- Use of evidence, evidence and research expertise
- Transparency of all services
- Leadership from the middle
ISLANDS OF INNOVATION
Where are the Islands of Innovation?

- Individual faculty innovators
- Stand-alone programs
- Some whole departments
What are the Innovations

- English
  - Whole to part teaching
    - Authentic tasks
    - Entire books and articles
  - More contextualized learning
  - Greater use of student groups, student presentations and other activities relying upon the “smarts of students”
What are the Innovations

- Reading
  - Teaching of more sophisticated reading skills
  - Predicting inference
  - Conventions of different genres
  - Analyzing and critiquing texts
  - Greater use of non-fiction
  - Integration of reading and writing courses
What are the Innovations

- **Reading Apprenticeship**
  - Origins in K-12
  - Higher-order questions to interrogate text
    - What does the author intend?
    - How different readers interpret the text
    - Four domains of context
      - Social interactions
      - Personal dimensions
      - Cognitive dimensions
      - Knowledge-building dimensions
THE NEED FOR INSTITUTIONAL COHERENCE
Institutional Coherence

- Alignment and integration of instruction and student services
- Focus on the classroom and pedagogy
- Re-assess assessment practices
- Re-assess the pre-collegiate sequence
- Promote a culture of risk-taking
- Long-term sustained professional development for faculty
- Minimize the fund-dependent strategies
Questions

1. How can colleges establish sustainable and renewable instructional practices that support student success?
2. How can colleges integrate delivery of student support and instructional services?
3. How can colleges evolve a culture of risk?
4. How much does reform cost?
5. Beyond budgets, in what ways does the college demonstrate completion as a priority?
6. How do hiring priorities reflect the colleges’ future needs?
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Inside and Outside of Classrooms

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