

Developmental Symposium*

Who is the Underprepared Student An Overview of What Works in the Classroom

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“Developmental students are a lot like any other students, only more so.”

If they are underprepared in one area, it is more likely that they are also underprepared in some other area.

They lack:

1. Study skills
2. Critical thinking skills and problem solving skills (this is the number 1 complaint of employers).

They do not belong to some monolithic group. The root of their problem is complex; just like the solution is complex.

I. Cognitive characteristics of the underprepared student

1. They may have minor weaknesses in one subject area
2. They may have major weaknesses in one subject area
3. The fact that they have major weaknesses in English or reading makes it likely that they will have weaknesses in several subject areas
4. They are likely to have weaknesses in study skills and critical thinking skills
5. They have major weaknesses in multiple subject areas
6. Underpreparedness is not a monolithic phenomenon
7. Underpreparedness is a complex phenomenon without simple solutions

II. Noncognitive characteristics of underprepared students

1. They suffer from academic performance anxiety
A high level of anxiety creates worry which interferes with learning
2. They lack instrumental autonomy

* Boylan gave out a skeleton handout at the workshop. I added the notes I took to his skeleton.
Jon

They do not believe that there is a causal connection between working hard and success. From their limited perspective they think that things just happen to you. Their actions have little impact on outcome. They get a good grade because they lucked out or got a bad grade because you didn't like them. That is where their excuses come from.

3. They lack a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. (internal vs external)

Good students have a balance between the two whereas developmental students are not internally motivated to succeed in school, and they cannot connect up their desire for success to their own actions. They do not lack motivation. They are just not motivated towards schoolwork.

III. Major research studies in developmental education

1. The National Study of Developmental Education
2. The Evaluation of the TASP Program
3. The Evaluation of Developmental Education in Texas Colleges and Universities
4. The CQIN/APQC Benchmarking Study
5. The League for Innovation Study

IV. What works in developmental instruction (ordered in ascending importance)

12. Provide frequent testing

This helps to combat the anxiety that students feel from the testing process as well as allow students to adjust to your expectations and improve study habits accordingly. They just get better with practice.

11. Provide frequent feedback

Once again the absence of feedback promotes anxiety and confusion about what you expect. With feedback you can motivate your students and TEACH.

10. Specify objectives and expectations

We have different expectations of students in college than in high school. We need to communicate and explain them and reiterate that frequently. To be effective this needs to be done by all the instructors in the program. Also other expectations need to be communicated systematically and clearly.

9. Integrate classrooms and laboratories

Too often we say to our students, "The writing lab is down the hall." We need to coordinate our efforts and curriculum with the writing lab in some way. It is good to have instructors working in the lab so that this connection between curriculum and tutoring can be facilitated and so that

the tutors can get to know the instructors, their assignments and their expectations. This is a very important element.

8. Develop learning communities

Student to student collaboration helps with student success. However you can encourage and facilitate this within your class as well as with other types of support groups. (ie Puente)

7. Accommodate diverse learning styles

Because of this diversity we need to diversify our teaching methods, develop different approaches to presenting material, visual, hands-on, graphic, discussion, group work. We need to mix up every class session with these elements to present a balanced approach.

6. Integrate study skills with content

Studies show that study skills classes do not work. Students need to incorporate these lessons with the content of the class right away. That way they develop new strategies for learning that become habit and stay with them in their future classes.

Stop! What are you doing?

From time to time during the lecture Boylan would blurt out, “Stop.” His point was that we should do that in our classes to bring students back from whatever they were thinking or doing to the subject matter of the class. We all have a limited attention span, developmental students shorter than others for the academic discourse, and this is a way to engage their attention again. Obviously this needs to be done with the right tone and without being judgmental.

5. Integrate critical thinking with content

Critical thinking needs to be incorporated into pedagogy across the curriculum. This facilitates learning in several ways:

- A. Students enjoy the class more
- B. The class makes more sense to them
- C. They immediately differentiate their college experience from high school
- D. They are more likely to apply these skills to other areas, such as other classes and their daily lives.

4. Engage in continuous faculty development

During their studies of the affect of tutoring on developmental learning, they could find no statistical value until they studied only those programs that trained their tutors. Then there was a significant improvement in the student outcome results. Tutors need to be trained. If that is true, then guess what? Teachers need to be trained too! Part-time training and full-time training on a continuous basis is essential.

3. Encourage communication among developmental faculty

This is important within disciplines and between disciplines.

2. Engage in formative evaluation of courses

If you are planning to implement changes in the program, you need set the base line data in order to gauge the effect of the changes. Without that there is not way to determine if what you are attempting is having a beneficial impact on the program. You need to establish the average pass rate, rates of retention, etc. Boylan says that he advises developing statistics on students that pass the developmental course and then go on to the next level and pass. That is the real determinant of success.

1. Practice classroom assessment

In Boylan's opinion this is the most important element. It is a way of getting information as the class is going on so that you can improve your teaching; it reduces student anxiety, and increases student sense of autonomy and being a part of the academic experience.

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