*Developmental Education, Readings on its past, present, and future*

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*Notes*

The first chapter concerns historical programs and theories in Developmental Education. The following questions from the chapter deserve reflection:

1. Developmental Education in one form or another has been a fixture of higher education for hundreds of years. Why do so few people outside the field realize this? What can we do about it?
2. Underprepared students represent a considerable percentage of the population at community colleges. Despite their numbers, they are often unwelcome. Why is this? What can we do to change it?
3. Dev. Ed. has evolved from one-to-one tutoring to multifaceted programs featuring courses and support services. What are the themes that have consistently characterized the field as it has undergone this evolution?
4. How does Dev. Ed. fit into the struggle in education between elitism and egalitarianism?
5. Despite decades of reform in education, the need for so-called remedial education has not gone away. Why?

Chapter two moves away from the history and into the present state of Dev. Ed.

The first article includes the following recommendations for an effective dev. ed. program:

1. Assessment and Placement: All incoming students are evaluated and , where necessary, placed in remediation according to a mandatory comprehensive instrument for assessing reading, writing, and mathematics.
2. Curriculum Design and Delivery: The goals and objectives of the remedial program must be defined clearly so that all students understand them.
3. Support Services: Underprepared students require individualized help. Effective programs are “intrusive” advising to identify and solve problems early.
4. Evaluation: The remedial education program’s effectiveness is assessed according to how many students complete remedial education programs, how many excel and continue on to college-level courses, ow many complete college-level courses, and how many reach their academic goals.

These are all great points to consider and I think it would be worth reflecting on how our program (both English developmental courses and math) are doing.

Other areas covered in this chapter are the importance of collaboration with academic and student affairs and learning assistance centers. Again, the important place of effective learning centers is apparent.

Although very detailed and comprehensive, it was worth taking some time to look at the article in this chapter that explored outcomes for students taking dev. courses. As the authors state, the commonsense impression that remedial coursework is taken by students with poor high school preparation or very weak academic skills is inaccurate. The authors’ analysis indicates that many college students with limited academic skills do not take remedial coursework, while substantial numbers of students with strong high school backgrounds nevertheless take remedial courses. Nor is remedial coursework the preserve of the economically disadvantaged. These empirical findings contrast with the public debates that portray remediation as a preserve of a small group of academic incompetents who have no hope of success in higher education.

Questions for consideration from this chapter:

1. How well are developmental courses and support services integrated at SLCC?
2. What are some of the reasons dev. students fail to progress and complete their degrees?
3. What policies could best improve dev. ed. courses at SLCC?

The overriding question while reading this book is how effective can we be at SLCC since we no longer have a dedicated dev. ed. division? It is possible, I believe, to still be successful, but it’s probably harder.

Chapter three looks to the future of dev. ed. This section had many contributors with interesting and innovative ideas regarding dev. ed.

One of the great takeaways from this volume is the reminder that so-called remedial education is not a new phenomenon. It has existed for at least 200 years in the US, including at universities like Harvard and Yale! It is incumbent upon us to communicate to our colleagues and legislators, etc. the facts. Remedial students have not suddenly descended on higher education. Instead of resisting, abolishing, or hiding, dev. ed. it needs to be supported and put at the center of what we do as educators, at least in community colleges.

Another takeaway is the recognition that as third level education becomes more egalitarian new groups will enter college and many will be underprepared and deemed unworthy by some. This bias is part and parcel of teaching dev. ed. and we should embrace the challenge!

A final takeaway: reform efforts take time. In other words no amount of public school reform is going to substantially reduce the number of unprepared students entering college.

Here are some final questions to consider:

1. What innovations from this chapter might be worth looking at in more detail?
2. How does SLCC promote and support innovations? (I’m thinking the Center for Innovation)
3. How can innovative courses/programs be scaled up to help more students?
4. How can these programs be disseminated effectively to adjuncts?