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Reflections on the Future of Developmental Education, Part II

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Question 3

What do you think about removing developmental education from 4-year colleges and universities?

Opposed to removing developmental education from 4-year institutions: Arendale, Gebert, Silva, and Vukovich are quite clear in their responses with a resounding "no" to removing developmental education from 4-year institutions. Arendale's position is that developmental courses and support services allow the colleges to maintain their academic standards (Arendale, 1998b). Developmental education helps students to achieve the requisite knowledge and skills to meet the standards of the regular courses. Furthermore, he argues that good academic support and developmental education programs promote higher reenrollment and retention rates (Tinto, 1998). Arendale would like to see learning centers as the focus for effective campus-wide retention programs. Learning centers are designed to help all students to improve their learning mastery skills and grades.

Gebert is opposed to blanket removal of developmental education from 4-year institutions. She argues that "there are many more political considerations than educational ones, but I think many can make the case that triple remediation students are facing a difficult road in a 4-year school." If remediation courses were removed, colleges would have to develop "a clear description of how students who have deficiencies will be served" (Boylan, 1995). She asks: "Will we go back to a noncredit 'bonehead' English course? Will institutions develop arrangements with local colleges providing remediation? Will admission/placement standards change?"

Gebert and Vukovich point out that developmental education serves many students who have a deficiency in only one or two academic areas (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). These students can and have been successful in 4-year school developmental education programs. Vukovich claims that a "myth abounds that all developmental students are enrolled only in developmental courses. Definitely not so. Many need only one developmental course (often mathematics). Should these students waste one term taking only one course at a 2-year college? I think not."

Silva is quite blunt in his response to the removal of developmental education from 4-year institutions: "I think this would be a mistake. It is my belief that there will always be a need for developmental education at all institutions of higher education. I think that there will always be students who need that extra push or support regardless of ACT/SAT scores."

Uncertain about removing developmental education from 4-year institutions: Hunter Boylan's response is a "resounding maybe." Unlike his counterparts, he identifies a complex situation. Different conditions require different approaches. Major universities, such as "Harvard, Duke, Berkeley, and smaller, private-quality schools, such as Denison, Davidson, Monmouth, and Reed, probably can do without remedial/developmental courses. Nonetheless, they probably will continue with some form of learning assistance."

State universities, on the other hand, he's not so sure of. Although he discusses the issue in terms of the quality of the entering students, it is clear that he is also talking about the competitiveness of the

institutions. Competitive state universities might be able to do without developmental education, but average and mediocre ones should keep them. Economics plays a critical role in his analysis. States that are economically poor should keep their programs, and states that are not may be able to get along without them.

Of all the respondents, Maxwell does not commit herself either way on the issue. Instead she offers, "It has already been done for the most part in selective colleges that are publicly funded and in most selective private colleges." She traces the movement to rid 4-year colleges of remedial courses to 1980. In her view, this movement "will shortly encompass all 4-year institutions except open-admission schools and they too will be changed. Only a few states are still dragging their heels." She feels that selective colleges will maintain their comprehensive learning assistance programs for all students and offer supplementary instruction or other intensive services for the small percentage of special-admit students, such as athletes and other scholarship holders, who will need developmental work. In a sense, this means returning to policies that were popular before the 1960s. Exactly where she stands on the issue can only be surmised. Her writing points to the need for all institutions of higher learning to provide comprehensive learning assistance services for all students (Maxwell, 1997).

Question 4

Some people argue that community colleges are better suited to offer developmental education than 4-year institutions (Almeida, 1992; Jacobson, 1993; Jones, 1998; NADE, 1998; National Education Association, 1999; Steinberg 1996; Zumeta 1998). What is your opinion?

The issue is complex: For Boylan, the issue is complex. Again, he emphasizes the influence of the type of institution and region. He cites Florida as an example of a state with a long history of using community colleges to prepare students for the university. Louisiana, on the other hand, has no such tradition. Relegating all remedial/developmental programs to community colleges would not be a good idea. Boylan points out that there are several problems with relegating remedial courses to community colleges: 1. Research reveals that students who start their higher education at community colleges have far less chance of completing a 4-year degree than those who begin at 4-year institutions. 2. Minorities are less likely to be retained at community colleges than at 4-year institutions (Boylan 1993). 3. Academic preparation at one school does not necessarily equate to the academic requirements of another. 4. Because there is a one-to-one correlation of economic status to need for developmental education, relegating developmental education to community colleges will surely create an academic caste system (Zumeta, 1998). Students who are rich and white will go to the universities; those who are poor and people of color will go to community colleges.

Nonetheless, Boylan believes that community colleges could be the primary providers of remedial courses. What is needed is a close collaboration between the 4-year schools and the 2-year schools to coordinate preparation (National Education Association, 1999; Zumeta, 1998). Those students coming from the 2-year remedial programs would enter strong, 4-year academic support programs. To make this system work, community colleges would need to cease hiring untrained adjunct faculty to teach most of their remedial courses and to take more seriously their role as preparatory institutions for 4-year schools. If these conditions are met, community colleges might be better suited to offer remedial courses. Without these changes, Boylan points out, students seeking a 4-year degree "are far more likely to get it if they start at a 4-year institution."

Gebert takes a different point of view. For her, community colleges may be more accessible to students who have not prepared themselves sufficiently for college-level work. However, she shares

Boylan's view that community colleges are "better suited" to provide developmental education only if you believe that they can respond to student needs more effectively than 4-year institutions. "Better suited" raises the question of quality in my mind," she argues. "A quality program is not by definition located in a community college. Faculty and staff with the skills and abilities to help students with their remediation needs can be found in a variety of educational institutions."

Another issue for Gebert is cost. If "better suited" means at less cost to students and taxpayers, she believes, then community colleges can probably make a case for their educational programs (National Education Association, 1999; Zumeta, 1998).

Arendale is concerned about the impracticability of today's student traveling long distances to attend a community college. Today's typical community college students are older, with at least one dependent, and work either full- or part-time. His argument is that "the idea that these students should attend community college for remedial work is unworkable."

Vukovich is not convinced community colleges offer the best alternative. "Most 2-year colleges have a less comprehensive array of academic support services than do 4-year institutions. They would need a great deal more money to become as well equipped as the 4-year programs.

Silva shares similar views with his colleagues. "I believe that community colleges are capable of offering developmental education, but I'm not sure that they are 'better suited.'" His university offers developmental courses through academic departments (i.e., math and English) that "do a fine job in preparing students." Their Learning Assistance Center supports the courses with lab assistants.

Maxwell takes a different stance. She notes that community colleges are already providing most of the remedial coursework. Nonetheless, they, too, will have "to become more selective in the next decade as the potential college enrollment increases 15%. They won't have money to do it all, and I expect that required developmental education courses will be dropped." This view is shared by others (Cohen & Brawer, 1996) that community colleges are having an increasingly difficult time providing instruction for the large number of underprepared students coming in their doors.

Question 5

If you had total control and unlimited resources, describe the components of your ideal academic support program.

A comprehensive program: Boylan has provided the fullest description of ideal program components. However, it is clear from each of the responses that the experts envision a comprehensive learning assistance program that includes professional training and development; mandatory student assessment and placement; rigorous program evaluation; varied methods of instructional delivery; qualified and creative faculty and staff; good counseling, advising, and mentoring programs; peer tutoring; Supplemental Instruction; paired courses; and outreach activities to faculty (Arendale, 1998b, 1998a; Maxwell, 1997; NADE, 1999).

Boylan sets up the following hierarchy of components for his ideal academic support program:

1. Professional development. At the beginning of each year, every faculty and staff member in the program would set up a professional development plan. The program would pay the costs for the faculty and staff to get the training outlined in the plan.

- 2. Program evaluation.** Boylan argues strongly for an evaluation plan that is "both formative and summative, qualitative and quantitative." The school should retain the necessary personnel and resources to carry out regular evaluation, the results of which should be shared with everyone in the program. This information should be used to improve and refine the program.
- 3. Use of good theory.** Everyone in the program should be grounded in good learning assistance program theory. The program should be modeled on the theory adopted by the program, and all activities within the program should be consistent with it.
- 4. Advanced assessment and diagnosis.** The program should purchase the best assessment instruments available and assess every student in the program prior to placement. Assessment should include both affective and cognitive characteristics, and individual student learning plans should be developed from them.
- 5. Supplemental Instruction (SI).** Funds should be allocated to hire a coordinator and to pay SI leaders. SI should be provided for all "problem courses" (Arendale, 1998b, 1998a, 1997; Blanc, DeBuhr, & Martin, 1993).
- 6. Kellogg Institute.** Two people from the program should be sent to the Institute each year.
- 7. Classroom assessment.** Boylan proposes that everyone teaching in the program should be thoroughly trained in classroom assessment techniques. These assessments should be supported by the program and shared on a regular basis. Faculty using classroom assessment should be rewarded and supported.
- 8. Comprehensive services.** The advanced assessment system needs to be supported by a wide variety of interventions to accommodate individual learning plans. These interventions should include 16-week remedial courses, individualized tutorial programs, short-term workshops, and individualized computer-based learning.

In his final recommendations, Boylan proposes sending professional program staff to both the CRLA and NADE annual conferences and setting up paired courses. He would pair developmental courses with regular curriculum courses (Smoke & Haas, 1995; Tomlinson & Green, 1976). The faculty in both courses would coordinate their assignments and activities.

Gebert presents a brief list of components. The list includes: (a) clear and appropriate statement of mission, goals, and purposes; (b) mandatory pretesting and placement; (c) qualified creative faculty and support staff; (d) varied methods of learning opportunities, progression, and exit; (e) sound assessment and long-range follow-up of students and program; (f) student, faculty, and staff recognition and accompanying partnerships with other academic/student affairs areas; and (g) appropriate location, status, and involvement with the institution as a whole.

Vukovich defers to Martha Maxwell's suggestions for the optimum developmental education program as outlined in Appendix 4.1 of Maxwell's (1997) *Improving Student Learning Skills*. In the appendix Maxwell describes a comprehensive learning assistance program with all the elements we have previously noted.

Silva, too, offers a brief list that includes: (a) trained faculty with emphasis on developmental education, (b) a sound academic advisement program, (c) counselling services (mental health care) that include career services, (d) academic support through labs (tutorial), and (e) mentoring programs (faculty/student).

Maxwell is strongly in favor of a program to serve all students from freshmen through graduate-level study in a variety of ways: individual study skills, counseling, courses where enrollment is voluntary, peer tutoring and tutor training, outreach activities with faculty members, Supplemental Instruction, writing center, and special programs like GRE and LSAT reviews. All of these elements would be well coordinated with remaining developmental education programs.

Paradigm shift: As we have noted before, Arendale is convinced that developmental education needs to undergo a paradigm shift from remedial/developmental education (what he and others call the "medical model") to a learning assistance model supporting the academic needs of all students (Arendale, 1998b, 1998a, 1997; Guffey, Rampp, & Masters, 1998). He cites his department as a model of learning assistance for all faculty members. Expert in many areas of teaching and learning (peer/collaborative learning, informal classroom assessment, new paradigms of student learning pedagogy, instructional technology, affective domain needs of students, curriculum development, peer reviews of teaching styles, professional development activities, and adapting instruction for diverse learning styles), his department has been sought out by other departments and individual faculty at his institution for assistance. In this manner, the department has become integrated into the academic community. This integration allows the department to become "partners in the learning process," a "teaching learning center." His argument is that, "we need to reinvent ourselves as resources for the entire campus -- students and faculty alike -- in renewing the learning environment."

Conclusion

The decision to write this paper was based on the author's recognition that as the 20th century was coming to an end, developmental education faced an uncertain future. The paper became a means of probing the issue through some of the best minds in the profession. In the "Introduction" (Part I), we noted some of the demographic, political, and economic trends that are reshaping higher education as it relates to developmental education. We also noted the controversy among developmental educators, some of whom question the validity of the "medical model" of learning assistance. From our discussion, can we say that there are clear trends emerging?

The dialogue points to several emerging trends: (a) mainstreaming, (b) removal of developmental education from 4-year institutions, and (c) increased professionalism of developmental educators. Mainstreaming developmental education courses into college-level, graduation-credit programs of study fits into the paradigm of learning assistance and enrichment for all students. Without question, the participants in the discussion were unanimous in proposing a comprehensive academic support program that would include elements such as a learning center, adjunct or paired courses, Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, student assessment, and program evaluation. Boylan advocates funds for professional development and Gebert proposes faculty, student, and staff recognition whereas Silva includes academic advising, counseling, career services, mentoring, and especially faculty training in his list of important program components. Arendale and Vukovich propose a complete paradigm shift away from the medical model to learning support for all students. By deferring to Maxwell's (1997) latest book *Improving Student Learning*, Vukovich gives Maxwell credit for providing insight into best practices based on years of experience and the best research resulting in the recommendation of a comprehensive learning assistance model. The value of such a model is that it is more easily integrated into the academic process because it is understood as a service for all students. This model is not burdened by the stigma of serving only the least able students, who, for many academic, administrative,

and political leaders, are seen as a drain on the institution's academic standards.

To the extent that developmental education is under attack around the country, mainstreaming seems like an excellent strategy to circumvent its critics. If the trend to remove developmental education from 4-year and even 2-year institutions continues, then the academic needs of a large portion of the student body will not be met. According to Tinto (1998), nearly 4 in 10 students enter college with the need for some form of developmental education. In some institutions, developmental students make up the majority of the entering student body, requiring remediation in nearly every subject area. Tinto further points out that, currently, nearly 90% of all colleges and universities offer developmental assistance, including the "elite" schools.

An approach to combating the negative attitudes in the public, in the political arena, and among our administrative and academic colleagues is the increased professionalization of our ranks. Although only a few graduate programs exist to provide advanced degrees for developmental professionals, because of the proliferation of professional organizations on a national, regional, and state level developmental educators have many opportunities throughout the year to meet and discuss issues of importance. Further, the developmental educators listserve, LRNASST, plays a vital role in providing a communications link between professionals no matter where they work. Members of the listserve discuss a wide range of subjects and provide each other with valuable information. Several important publications are available for the dissemination of information and analysis of issues important to professionals, and readership of these publications is growing. I think it is clear that the more informed as a profession we are the better able we are to direct our energies where they need to be, namely to the service of our students.

In closing, I offer the following story. A woman who doesn't know what her future is says to a philosopher, "I'll figure it out when I get my head together." The philosopher replied, "Young lady, coming together is only momentary. The fusion doesn't last long before the whole is split apart again. Life is a process. All growth and development depend on it. When the process ceases, we die. Count yourself lucky if you continue to fragment after you come together at different stages of your life." I think we need to take the philosopher's words to heart. Times change and paradigms need to change with them.

CORRECTION: *Santiago Silva was incorrectly referred to as "Santiago" in Part I. We apologize for any confusion.*

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Acknowledgement

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