

High School to College: A Teacher to Teacher Connection



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Identification of Problem

- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board P-16 College Readiness Awareness Session, San Antonio
- *Closing the Gaps by 2015* (mission of TX Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS)
- Alamo College English Staff Development
- District Book Studies: David Conley's *College Knowledge* and *College and Career Readiness*
- Discipline Book Studies: *The Transition to College Writing* by Keith Hjortshoj and *What Is College Writing?* Edited by Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg



“Writing has always been at the heart of a university education and the university culture, and it will only become more important in a society whose economy is based on information exchange” (Conley 115).

Conley, David. *College Knowledge: What it Really Takes for Students to Succeed and What We Can Do to Get Them Ready*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005. Print.



The Teacher-to-Teacher Connection

- A local partnership
 - Northside Independent School District (NISD)
 - University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA)
 - Northwest Vista College (NVC)
- Focus
 - Instructional practices
 - Aligned curricula
 - Student transfer systems



Partnership Goals

- Coordinate efforts to align curriculum.
 - Develop a relationship via classroom visits.
 - Share curriculum, syllabi, rubrics, writing prompts, and samples of student writing.
- Develop and strengthen student transfer systems.
 - Identify places where students might struggle in the transition from high school to college.
 - Develop “bridge” assignments to facilitate transition.
- Design and implement shared professional development.



Partnership Design

- Participants: eight NISD English IV teachers, five UTSA and four NVC freshman composition instructors
- Initial Meeting, Feb. 2009
 - Purpose and Participant Expectations
 - Review of TEKS and CCRS
 - Observation Schedule and Expectations
 - Lesson design
 - Teacher/student interaction
 - Assignments



Partnership Design, Continued

- Observations: three high school, three college per team of teachers
- Final Meeting, May 2009
 - Written reflection + large-group discussion
 - What new understanding have you reached about high school/college composition classes?
 - What changes do you recommend in the curriculum/syllabi and/or assignments in high school/college classes?
 - What joint staff development would be beneficial?
 - What additions/changes for the initiative do you recommend?
 - Did you encounter any surprises? What myths were exploded?



Reflections from College Level

- Instructors at both levels need a common vocabulary (*e.g., thesis statement, syllabus, annotation*).
- College instructors must work to create a sense of continuity.
- College instructors must resist playing the blame game: “I was really surprised to see that so much of what we teach has already been taught to them in high school.”
- Continued communication between high school and college teachers benefits students.



Reflections from High School Level

- Teachers must increase the emphasis on academic writing, particularly persuasive essays.
- Teachers must aid students in becoming independent learners in order to meet college expectations of self advocacy and initiative.
- College students complete most of their writing assignments outside class whereas high school students do most writing in class.
- Students are held more accountable for deadlines and assignments at the college level.
- “One of the biggest surprises I experienced was how well my mentor and I complemented each other. We have several components which are so similar that the transition from my class to his would be fairly seamless.”



Implementation: Curricular Changes

- English 6-8: research (previously in reading)
- English 8: cause/effect essay
- English I: definition or example essay
- English II: classification or division essay
- English III: problem/solution, cause/effect, or comparison essay
- English IV: problem/solution, cause/effect, definition, or comparison essay; changed from a chronological to a thematic structure
 - While the issues students discuss in these papers may arise from the themes of literature, these essays will not be about literature.



Implementation, Continued

- Academic vocabulary: ethos, pathos, logos, logical fallacies

Maintained Requirements

- English 6: comparison essay (essay about literature)
- English 7: advantages/disadvantages essay
- All levels: persuasive essay
- English I-IV: research paper



Interventions: Sharing the Findings

- High School Coordinators
- Curriculum Writers
- High School Principal and Deans, April 2010
- Conference on College Composition and Communication, April 2010
- NISD Academics Committee, May 2010



Interventions, Staff Development

New Offerings

- Winter Conference 2010: *Next Level*, analysis of college essays with instructor annotations
- Summer 2010
 - Grammar Boot Camp
 - Writing Institute Refresher: Rhetorical Analysis

Continued Offerings

- Writing Institute of Northside, affiliate of Abydos Learning International
- Teaching Grammar in the Context of Reading and Writing (five-day session based on the work of Weaver, Strong, Shaughnessy, Noguchi, Noden)



Future of the Initiative, Phase II

- Broaden participation within the partnership.
- Continue collaborative conversations.
- Participate in shared learning:
 - Exchange seminars
 - Syllabus and rubric development
 - **Examination of student work**
 - Assessment
- Examine issues of transferability, including ways for teachers to explicitly make connections and strategies for assisting students in becoming reflective learners.



Monitoring Progress

- Curriculum Implementation
 - Teacher feedback for curriculum revision
 - Teacher requests for staff development
 - Regular reviews with campus English coordinators
 - **Writing sample collections**
- Freshman Composition Student Surveys via Pathways
- Data Sharing via Pathways
 - Developmental course participation
 - Freshman composition completion rates
- State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness



Reaching Success

- College-Ready Students
 - Decrease in the percentage of students taking remedial reading and writing classes
 - Increase in the percentage of students successfully completing freshman composition courses