Doing Developmental Education Differently

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *Inside Out*, a quarterly publication of the Community College Research Center's Scaling Innovation project. Funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Scaling Innovation is a groundbreaking research and implementation initiative designed to advance promising instructional reforms in developmental education. *Inside Out* aims to inform practitioners, researchers, and policymakers about our work and to initiate a conversation about the opportunities and challenges related to implementing developmental education instructional reforms. Each issue of *Inside Out* will be accompanied by a written response from a practitioner, researcher, or policymaker, which will be posted on our website. We invite others to share their thoughts, experiences, and feedback via the comments field at:

www.scalinginnovation.org/publications/insideout.

Why We Need Scaling Innovation

Despite the best efforts of dedicated practitioners, the academic outcomes for the nearly two-thirds of community college students who are placed into developmental education are alarmingly poor. Roughly 45 percent of students who place into a developmental math course one level below the college level complete their remediation requirements. Among students who begin three or more levels below college math, only 17 percent complete their entire developmental sequence. More than half of students who do complete all of their developmental courses do not complete the subsequent gatekeeper course.[1]

In response to these disconcerting figures, an increasing number of community colleges have modified instructional delivery and supports for students required to take remedial courses. Research conducted by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) and others suggests that developmental education reforms such as learning communities, compressed courses, and mainstreaming hold promise, though typically the benefits of these efforts appear to be modest and relatively short-term.[2] By examining developmental education reforms that have resulted in positive impacts on a small scale, Scaling Innovation seeks to understand how promising innovations can be scaled and adapted to different contexts in ways that may generate significant long-term impacts.

Our Partnerships

Creating meaningful improvements in the academic outcomes of students referred to developmental education will likely require a re-evaluation of both what students need to learn to be successful in college and how content can be delivered most effectively. CCRC has partnered with community college faculty members who are tackling these issues at their home institutions through high-potential innovations in developmental education instruction. As participants in Scaling Innovation, these faculty leaders are also committed to working with practitioners at other colleges as they adopt these instructional reforms and adapt them to new contexts.

Launched in 2007, the **Accelerated Learning Program** (ALP) is a mainstreaming model for basic writers at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC). Within this model, eight students who placed into upper-level developmental English enroll in a specially designated section of introductory college composition with twelve "college-ready" students. The ALP students simultaneously take a companion course taught by the same instructor. ALP exposes students who placed into developmental English to a more challenging curriculum while providing additional academic and social supports in an intimate, supplemental classroom environment.

Currently, CCBC offers 80 sections of ALP and plans to continue the program's expansion. A 2010 analysis conducted by CCRC found significant positive outcomes for ALP students compared with a matched comparison group of non-ALP students.[3] Through Scaling Innovation, ALP director and professor of English Peter Adams is leading an implementation team of ALP faculty who are provid-

ing hands-on support to two colleges that have adopted ALP. Adams and his team are in the process of selecting two additional colleges that will implement ALP in fall 2012.

Concepts of Numbers for Arithmetic and Pre-algebra was developed and piloted at Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, in 2008. This curricular reform employs a conceptual rather than topic-focused approach in teaching arithmetic in order to make mathematical connections more transparent and to provide students with sustained practice in foundational elements of quantitative reasoning. Internal evaluations conducted by MCCC suggest that, relative to students taking the traditional arithmetic course, a higher proportion of Concepts of Numbers students passed arithmetic and enrolled in and passed beginning algebra. Concepts of Numbers was fully scaled to all arithmetic sections at MCCC in fall 2011. Barbara Lontz, creator of Concepts of Numbers and professor of mathematics, has assembled a team of MCCC faculty who will work with two community colleges to launch and scale Concepts of Numbers at these institutions beginning in fall 2012.

The **California Acceleration Project** (CAP) is a collaboration between the California Community College Success Network (3CSN), the Walter S. Johnson Foundation,[4] and CCRC to support a network of community colleges as they pilot new course structures intended to provide students with more rigorous, relevant, and expeditious pathways to college-level math and English. CAP was developed and is led by Katie Hern, English professor at Chabot College in Hayward, California; and Myra Snell, mathematics professor at Los Medanos College in Pittsburg, California. Participating colleges have committed to developing and scaling acceleration models adapted from the open-access developmental English course at Chabot College and the Path2Stats course at Los Medanos College.

Internal analyses of the Chabot and Los Medanos courses indicate that students who have pursued these pathways have academic outcomes superior to those of students in the traditional sequences.[5] CAP is built on two underlying principles that have implications for instruction and for addressing students' academic and non-academic needs. First, colleges must shorten developmental sequences in order to significantly increase the number of students completing developmental education. Second, this type of restructuring must be accompanied by a pedagogical and curricular emphasis on the most essential skills and habits of mind required for student success at the college level. Under Scaling Innovation, CCRC is conducting an in-depth analysis of CAP's network approach to cultivating instructional innovation at a sample of participating community colleges.

Doing Developmental Education Differently

Scaling Innovation draws its inspiration from the dedicated practitioners who attribute poor academic outcomes not to community college students but to a failure of the institution to adequately meet student needs. This project directs attention to enthusiastic faculty who are confronting the challenges of developmental education through thoughtful and intentional risk-taking both in and outside the classroom. These instructors believe that it is their professional responsibility to inspire students to set high goals for academic performance

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DIFFERENTLY

• **How** innovations are executed **is as important as what** those innovations are.

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and work hard to achieve them. They assert that it is possible to do developmental education differently and that doing so is necessary if we are to significantly improve academic outcomes for students enrolling in remedial courses.

Preliminary analysis by CCRC highlights three important themes that will be explored in upcoming issues of *Inside Out*. First, when community colleges adopt instructional reforms, how innovations are executed is as important as what those innovations are. Institutions, in the rush to try new solutions to the challenges they encounter in developmental education, frequently focus on a narrow selection of popular reforms,

which may or may not address the particular issues students are confronting. A more systematic approach likely requires practitioners to engage in ways that prioritize the full process of innovation—from selection to implementation. Our work reveals that there is not a single best way to implement a reform; rather, gaining a better sense of how reforms can be modified to suit particular contexts allows institutions to serve the needs of students more effectively.

Second, faculty must lead the development, execution, and refinement of developmental education innovation. This process entails directing faculty expertise toward solving specific pedagogical challenges, rigorously measuring the results of that work, and continuously fine-tuning curricula and instruction based on assessments of student learning and academic progress.[6] Our early analyses suggest that while these tasks may involve a significant departure from traditional faculty roles, they have the potential to empower faculty in unexpected ways. Importantly, these ambitious efforts cannot be cultivated and expanded upon if done in isolation.

Finally, infrastructure must enable connections between practitioners and the provision of ongoing support within and across institutions and innovations. The infrastructure allows practitioners to brainstorm, troubleshoot, share expertise, and assess outcomes with others engaged in similar instructional improvement efforts. The potential benefits of this collegial interaction appear to be significant; however, our research suggests that it is difficult to structure and sustain faculty participation in productive collaborations. Scaling Innovation will examine the types of support systems that faculty are likely to engage in as well as how technology and professional networks (based on discipline, region, or reform approach) might be used to facilitate ongoing professional learning.

Inside Out strives to connect researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in a conversation about teaching and learning in developmental education classrooms and to share research findings that can advance the efforts of successful instructional reform. We invite you to join the conversation by signing up for CCRC email alerts at www.scalinginnovation.org. By joining our mailing list, you will be the first to receive notification about new issues of *Inside Out* and other publications by CCRC and our partners.

[1] Bailey, T., Jeong, D. W. & Cho, S.-W. (2009). *Referral, enrollment, and completion in developmental education sequences in community colleges* (CCRC Working Paper No. 15). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

[2] Quint, J., Byndloss, C., Collado, H., Gardenhire, A., Magazinnik, A., Orr, G., Welbeck, R., & Jaggars, S. (2011). *Scaling up is hard to do: Progress and challenges during the first year of the Achieving the Dream Developmental Education Initiative*. New York, NY: MDRC.

[3] Jenkins, D., Speroni, C., Belfield, C., Jaggars, S. S., & Edgecombe, N. (2010). *A model for accelerating academic success of community college remedial English students: Is the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) effective and affordable?* (CCRC Working Paper No. 21). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

[4] See the Walter S. Johnson Foundation website (http://www.wsjf.org/) for more information.

[5] Hern, K. (with Snell, M.). (2010). *Exponential attrition and the promise of acceleration in developmental English and math. Unpublished manuscript.* San Francisco, CA: Faculty Inquiry Network, Chabot College.

[6] Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., & Grunow, A. (2011). Getting ideas into action: Building networked improvement communities in education. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Frontiers in sociology of education* (pp. 127–162). New York, NY: Springer.

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CCRC

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We invite you to join the discussion.

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