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At-Risk Writer Program that Benefits Both the Students and the Educators

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At-Risk Writer Program that Benefits Both the Students and the Educators

Abstract

This session presented a small-college writing workshop model centered on increasing at-risk writers' persistence and motivation as they improved their writing through the use of pre-service teachers. An important component of the presentation was the one-on-one interactions that occurred and the value of these to both parties.

Keywords

writing, ability, academic achievement, college teachers

Disciplines

Secondary Education and Teaching | Teacher Education and Professional Development

Comments

Presented at the Annual National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Convention held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 19-22, 2015.

The presentation included participation by three former teaching assistants and Dordt College graduates, now practicing teachers: Laurissa Bowman, Kristin Janssen and Sonya Nyhof.

Bill Elgersma

NCTE Summary 2015

This presentation occurred at the 2015 NCTE conference in Minneapolis on November 21. While the presentation was intended to target colleges looking at starting or refining a developmental writing program, instead our attendees were all high school English teachers and one superintendent. Their interest during the Q&A centered on preparing their students adequately and the support provided through the program. For some, the concept of developmental writing seemed foreign and they wanted to hear what colleges were doing.

The highlight of the presentation was our three former teaching assistants, now practicing teachers, who were able to anecdotally relate what had occurred during their Dordt experience with what was currently occurring in their own classrooms. To hear them speak, I wonder how anyone could feel prepared to teach without that experience.

NCTE 2015

Dec 3, 2015

Overview/Proposal

“So-Called Basic Writers” a small college program that facilitates professors, preservice teachers, and practicing teachers while providing support and literacy education to freshmen students who scored too low to be generally admitted to college to make them successful.

The format includes 3 20 minute segments with time for questions either between each segment or at the end of the presentations.

The first segment presents the history of the program, an explanation of its structure, the professionals and departments involved, the profile of the students enrolled, the profile of the teaching assistants utilized, and English courses that offer additional preparation for the teaching assistants and the changes as the program matured.

The second segment is presented by the current professor teaching the course. This segment includes the day to day activities including the essential and topical questions that drive each unit within the semester and types of assignments and emphases that arise based on formative assessments. Additionally, this segment includes a snapshot into the professor’s weekly interactions with the teaching assistants as a mentor and a supervisor, working with them to provide additional tools for them when working one on one with “their” students.

The third segment is a presentation by practicing teachers who were part of the program prior to graduating. They will present a retrospective look at how their involvement in this program prepared them in ways they did not anticipate and gave them the confidence and freedom to think critically about how to effectively educate all students in their writing classrooms.

The final 15 minutes will be opened to the audience to ask questions, ask for clarifications, offer rebuttals, and make suggestions for further consideration.

Presenters:

Bill Elgersma Professor of English Dordt College, Sioux Center IA

Luke Hawley Asst. Professor of English Dordt College, Sioux Center IA

Current teachers:

Laurissa Bowman English teacher Highland, IN

Kristin Janssen English teacher, St Louis, MO

Sonya Nyhof Elementary teacher Jordan, Ont.

Bill Elgersma's part of the presentation

History

Accepting low scoring students

English department

Remediation

Initial proposal

Less than 18 ACT less than 2.0 GPA required to take course

Professor supported by teaching assistants (paid work study position)

Must pass course to remain enrolled at the college

Cannot repeat the course at the college

Attendance mandatory

Profile of student

Less than 18 ACT less than 2.0 GPA

Learning disability (often undiagnosed)

Low motivated

Low self-efficacy

Low engagement of risk

Insecure

Self-conscious

Attending college for curricular rather than education. Lack requisite skills to perform successfully

Profile of T/A

Preferably an English Language Arts education major

Strong writer

Excellent communication skills and ability to listen

Ability to motivate

Strong analytical skills

Thick skin

Must like people and want the best for them

Must be able to hold students to a higher standard

High self-efficacy

060—Writing for College course to prepare students to enter Eng 101 course

No course credit

3 class periods per week plus a lab with 1 on 1 tutoring with a teaching assistant

Offered both semesters

Students can only take 4 courses (12 credits) and this course per semester.

First changes

After year 1 we moved the course to the first semester only. These students struggle to write, why wait until second semester? Counterproductive

We reassigned t/as to meet with a maximum of 3 assigned students only 1 on 1 1 day per week.

T/A meetings became mandatory

We moved class meeting times to 9 and 10 am only.

Assigned a daily writing response to be delivered to the t/a and a weekly reading response delivered to the professor. This was above the polished essays that were also part of the course.

Second changes

Propose to have course offered for credit. It was approved for 4 credits, the last credit for the 1 hour lab.

T/As now were responsible for 30% of a student's grade for the semester.

Students evaluated on initial writing sample submitted and moved to English 101 if competency is demonstrated

Students scoring a C or above for the semester were exempt from enrolling in Eng 101

Number of papers assigned was reduced

Removed access to T/A when students would not use them as a resource and grade is reduced by 30%

Third changes

A provisional admittance committee was appointed to review all applicant files. The committee included professor, the director for academic support, and the vice president of enrollment management.

The baseline ACT score was raised

The application process included an essay on a writing prompt as an additional evaluative measure

All admitted students are required to meet as a group prior to the start of school to receive an overview of what the semester entails