Basic Skills Subcommittee

Thanks to everyone for participating in the Basic Skills Subcommittee meetings this semester. Please mark your calendars for next semester’s meetings (location TBA):

2/3 2:30 – 4 pm
2/24 2:30 – 4 pm
3/16 2:30 – 4 pm
4/13 2:30 – 4 pm
5/4 2:30 – 4 pm

On 9 December 2003, six groups of readers gave 10-minute presentations of three to five articles each on topics in Basic Skills theory, practice, and structure. Attached are the electronic notes from five of the groups, as well as one or two extra notes from some of the groups’ members. The sixth presentation group did not make electronic notes of their presentation and we have briefly summarized it below.

[Caution: We are not sure how the listserv handles attachments. The files are MS Word documents and should be fine, but if you have trouble and would like to have the notes, please email Hal (shuntsma@ccsf.edu) and he will send them to you directly].

Hal and Nadine
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Group 2 – Effective Practices: Karen Batchelor, Suzannah Bray, Keith McAllister, Mabel Michelucci, and Susana Mayorga

Among the effective practices mentioned in the articles, the group highlighted:

- Mandatory assessment and placement
- Effective teaching practices
- Learning communities
- Program evaluation
- Collaborative learning
- Coordination between tutoring services and the classroom content
- Staff development
- Supplemental instruction

Several of these practices were recommended by most or all of the articles.

The group also mentioned that a centralized model for Basic Skills instruction has the advantage of promoting communication and identity among Basic Skills instructors, but has the disadvantage of creating stigma among Basic Skills students.
Because time was limited at the meeting on Tuesday, we asked people to respond to the article presentations on paper. We are sending out highlights from those responses in order to further a conversation that began with the presentations and that can continue here, on the listserv, and in next semester’s meetings. The edits and selections were entirely Nadine’s and Hal’s and we take responsibility for any misspellings or misquotes. Finally, please remember that the response process was informal--take these excerpts as discussion points, not position statements.

Thank you to all those who were at the meeting and responded. As always, if you wish to contribute to the discussion, send your responses to: BasicSkillsCommittee@ccsf.edu.

Hal and Nadine

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“There is a great need for cooperative learning such as study groups and learning labs that coordinates class work with lab work in order to benefit students and increase pass rates.”
“Efficiency of resources seems to work better when there is a centralized system in place, but can be more costly.”
“Most important is the institutional commitment and regular evaluation of student outcomes. Need to develop clear set of goals and objectives.”
--Cecilia Sainez

“I am totally against [a Basic Skills Department]. Imagine how the students would feel when they are put in this ‘department?’ They might give up before they begin; it is a psychological concern. . . . My opinion is not to have major shakeups, but to continue with our present structure. . . . Let us work on better coordination between departments and services.
--Mo-Shuet Tam

[It is helpful to think about] high risk classes vs. high risk students [and about] making content a vehicle for building cognitive skills."
--Suzannah Bray

“I [like] the idea of a counseling component with remedial classes that emphasizes motivation and attitude.”
“Need for more professional training to make basic skills classes taught well. . . . Do we need learning labs attached to ‘high-risk’ classes?”
“I think we need to consider and identify both ['high-risk' students and 'high-risk' classes]."
--Marylou Massey-Henderson
"The benefits of a centralized program can be addressed by a decentralized program. For example, if you want to hire basic skills specialists, you can do this within decentralized programs."

"The point about content being a 'vehicle' for developing cognitive skills struck a chord. It would be liberating for many in basic skills English classes to feel released from ‘delivering’ skills to focus on real reading and talking about reading, including metacognitive instruction. Isn’t this what students need to do to be successful at the higher levels?"

--Lisa King

"Pay instructors more for basic skills courses and the ‘status’ will go up. Give basic skills instructors priority when assigning courses. There are many ways to compensate for those who fear being labeled a ‘basic skills’ instructor."

--Tore Langmo

"Professional development: does that mean basic skills educators need to have a professional identity as basic skills educators? . . . Intrigued by the potential power of promoting the idea that cognitive development continues beyond childhood."

--Anastasia Fiandaca

"We’ve read nothing about the cost and cost effectiveness of different types of programs."

--Eva Schiorring

"A Basic Skills Department? Should we instead be beefing up the Transitional Studies department?"

"I appreciated the stress on self-evaluation. If we are to give both pre- and post-assessment, we’ll need support from the staff."

"All the recommendations for Basic Skills classes are just as useful in college-level classes."

--Fred Teti

"I’d like to hear more discussion about the duplication of services—a big concern at CCSF."

--Carol Heard

"I like the idea of graduate credits as an incentive for teacher training."

--Valerie Berger

"I think CCSF is on the right track but needs much greater coordination of and communication between programs."

"It seems that the research fairly consistently puts out there what works; it’s up to us to prioritize and then implement, get full institutional buy-in from the top down, 
and then work on developing a high level of collaboration and communication among services and programs. . . . Many programs are isolated from each other. We need to develop an institutional best practices model that can be applied to many programs. . . . Title III has initiated coordination and communication and given basic skills spokespersons. We need to continue in this vein. I think CCSF could successfully develop a coordinated, decentralized model. . . . [One of the] real challenges coming out of this research is developing a consistent curriculum among individual instructors and across departments.”
--Lindy McKnight

“Some readings on pedagogy—what happens in the classroom—would be useful.”
--Sharon Seymour

“Student achievement, basic skills, and multicultural education are all the same conversation. The college classroom, in both content and teaching methods, has traditionally used Euro-centric models. Basic Skills students are often students of color who are non-traditional and bring different learning styles and knowledge bases. For the success of these students, it’s imperative we examine our course curriculum, content, and teaching methods to bring multicultural perspectives to the classroom.”
--Lynda Hirose

“Although community colleges are traditionally open-door, post-secondary institutions (and thus will generally serve a larger population of under-prepared students), you may still find instructors who resent the presence of developmental education (DE) students in their classrooms. What to do? 1. Attempt to change campus climate—make DE efforts part of the mission and purpose of the college; 2. Instructor training—how to meet the needs of DE students; 3. Show connection between the development of skills and the eventual enhancement of their individual academic discipline; 4. More full-time faculty.”
--Stacey Sandeford-Lyons

“How do the regular academic departments view developmental education students? Would those instructors be willing to incorporate DE strategies?”
--Joanne McGlothlin

“CCSF Basic Skills Rubric [for evaluation of our programs is an] excellent idea. But, it must include learning outcomes required for success in the next level of courses.”

“Computer literacy is important for Basic Skills students. [We should] update course outlines [accordingly].”
--Elizabeth Stewart.
“Other than the feeling/perception of ‘stigma,’ what is the negative with the centralized program structure, i.e., 1. how is a student actually ‘hurt?’ and 2. Is the potential benefit greater than the stigma?”
“This literature points out that a ‘systematic’ evaluation is thorough. Is this at odds with creating a CCSF self-evaluation rubric that is ‘simple and easy to use?’
“Keimig’s model for Developmental Education is more complex and extensive than presented. It deserves a fuller and clearer airing.”
-- Jim Sauve

“Helping students feel more a part of the college is something that we may be able to start in College Success classes.”
-- Cindi Harrison

“What programs at CCSF do not currently have mandatory placement and how is placement between departments coordinated? For instance, I know that students often enroll in social science (etc.) courses that require reading levels above their English placement level. What information do we have on the value of prerequisites (or some other system) for helping developmental students succeed?”
“What are current students’ reactions to the level (or lack thereof) of coordination among students?”
-- Alexandra Teague

“Continual self-evaluation is important. Include students in this and student organizations.”
“We need an assessment tool which shows learners what they need in relation to their goals so that they can be responsible, even aggressive, about using what’s offered. We want them to have stakes in learning and development.”
-- Timotha Doane