

Developmental Education Content Committee: Reading

Final Report

March 2015

Foreword

Since this Outcomes Committee was directed by the legislature to identify “college-ready” learner outcomes for reading; to make recommendations for transfer of developmental courses; and to make recommendations for aligning competencies and creating targeted interventions for high school students, there have been two bills introduced in the legislature relative to developmental education that seriously impact our work. In fact, it seems as if the charges from last year are somewhat a moot point if these bills are enacted into law. This committee would like to address the mandates in these bills as part of our final report.

Senate bill SF352 and House bill HF 647 have been proposed. These bills would mandate “supplemental instruction” at all MnSCU colleges to take the place of at least some developmental coursework and allow any student to enroll in any entry level college course in reading, writing or mathematics, while receiving out-of-class “support” in that subject area. Although these bills will continue to be revised, they are a source of concern.

This committee acknowledges the fact that many students begin college below “college-ready,” and do not graduate. We, too, are concerned for our students. There are many “best practices” for meeting the challenge of open admissions policies that result in students who are not ready to take and succeed in college level coursework. Various approaches have been taken by our MnSCU colleges, ranging from learning communities and paired classes (curricular) to Tutors-Linked-To-Courses, and Supplemental Instruction (tutoring models outside of curriculum). Many reading departments are looking for ways to accelerate students into their programs of study so as not to spend too much time in prerequisite courses. It is very important for both MnSCU’s system office and our legislators to understand that we are professionals who know how to make these changes, and we are already doing so.

We are extremely doubtful that one single approach, such as “supplemental instruction,” can adequately address the range of reading needs we encounter in the community college system. This type of mandated program appears to suggest that a “tutor,” which could be a peer or a professional, can substitute for a qualified reading instructor.

We are concerned that senators and representatives would mandate specific teaching methods and content rather than listening to the faculty who actually teach developmental students. We believe they do not understand the role that reading plays in the success of students, nor do they understand the devastating consequences of denying students direct instruction by qualified professionals.

Following are a few of the concerns we have:

- Placement testing must be addressed. Many students are under placed by the Accuplacer; this is a known problem. We encourage the use of multiple measures and of opportunities for test preparation and practice. These two practices will reduce the numbers of students who are placed into developmental courses. This would cost money; test review, the use of practice tests, and paying staff/faculty to run sessions would increase the costs for PRE-enrolled students. Colleges typically try to keep costs down for these potential students who might never enroll or choose another college. However, we believe that funds to support pre-enrollment analysis would be helpful to all MnSCU institutions.

- It is very risky for a student with serious reading deficiencies to be enrolled in a college level course without any preparation. The consequences of being unsuccessful will directly impact the student's GPA. This puts students at risk for academic probation, as well as in the difficult situation of trying to make up for a low GPA. Even with a second, more successful, semester, the student with a GPA of 1.0 will likely fall below the requisite 2.0 needed for Satisfactory Academic Progress.
 - The first (lower) level of developmental placement is not easily merged with college level courses for the reasons above. We recommend that students continue to enroll in a reading course prior to attempting full-blown college content. Further, we recommend that these students be supported by either first-year seminar coursework, intrusive advising, extended orientations, or some other supportive structure that helps them learn how to function in the college environment.
 - We would suggest that we follow many colleges' models of co-requisite instruction for the second (higher) levels of developmental reading. Students enroll in a college level course, and are also in a reading course that is customized and contextualized to meet the needs of the content course. Students are often in a cohort (all the students in the reading section are taking the same content course).
- Colleges will be very tempted to choose a "lowest cost" model for any supplemental instruction.
 - Models that have a national track record, such as Supplemental Instruction (from the University of Missouri Kansas City) and Structured Learning Assistance (from Ferris State University) cost money to train staff and maintain. To adopt them includes an entire system of data collection and analysis, as well as an overseer or director.
 - Peer tutors, while excellent role models and content assistants, are not trained teachers. They cannot be expected to provide initial instruction and they do not have expertise in learning or in reading.
 - Professional tutors, such as College Lab Assistants, are difficult to find for the range of subjects that would be needed. Additionally, most people do not view the role as a career, so there is turnover as they matriculate to more desirable and better paying positions. It would be quite expensive for colleges to hire CLAs for "any" subject.
- It is difficult to find and keep appropriate tutors, whether peer or professional, for all subjects and courses. Our two-year institutions experience high turnover in their peer tutor ranks because these successful students graduate and/or transfer rather efficiently. Mandating support services for "any" entry level college course puts colleges in an impossible situation.
- The bills include the stipulation that students would be forced to pay the value of 0.5 credits if they utilize the support services. First, it is antithetical to the usual practice in higher education in Minnesota to charge students for tutoring. Second, it would be very problematic to actually figure out how to charge students. What if a student didn't use any supplementary services? Should a student pay the same for one encounter with a review session as another student pays for several sessions? How would this be billed? Financial Aid wouldn't pay for these services, so what if a student couldn't afford them? What if "college-ready" students also attended review sessions—would they receive this service for free?

Finally, the legislators might consider the questions posed by the report "Heavy Lifting: The State Capacities Required for Scaled Developmental Education Reform." Other states have learned lessons

from their experiences reforming developmental education; it is important for Minnesota to thoughtfully consider them. Those questions are:

- What reform efforts are happening at colleges in the state now? How can those colleges' experiences and results help others understand the called-for reform?
- Does the state's policy environment support the called-for reforms? What changes are needed?
- What data does the state have on student outcomes? How can that data be used to help others understand the need for reform?
- What existing statewide committee structures/working groups can be leveraged for communicating and engaging with faculty across the state?
- What reforms are happening in peer states? Can their tools, templates, and other products be modified and put to good use in this state?
- What existing statewide convenings can be leveraged for communicating and engaging with faculty across the state?
- How much funding is allocated for evaluation of the called-for reform?
- With whom might the system partner for evaluation?
- Which funders are interested in improving student outcomes in this state?

(Collins 26)

Executive Summary

The Reading Outcomes Committee began its work in Fall 2013 with the following charges from the Vice Chancellor:

- To “develop and submit recommendations of specific competencies and student learner outcomes to be mastered for ‘college and career readiness standards’ for...Reading.”
- To provide recommendations to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs for successful transfer of developmental coursework in MnSCU.
- To make recommendations of “specific strategies” for “aligning competencies, student learner outcomes and targeted interventions” that will result in college readiness for high school students.

The committee’s make up included reading instructors from several community and technical colleges. This group met four times during 2013-2014, and reconvened in February, 2015 to finalize the report. We intentionally considered the variety and diversity of our colleges in Minnesota, which have very different student populations, resources, and programs. We pooled the learner outcomes from all of our college reading programs and used them as the basis for identifying the skills of college ready readers. We avoided any prescriptive language that would reduce any college’s ability to create programming that is best for their institutions.

For our first charge, we have created a description of college ready reading. We agreed on four general areas:

- Independent and Self-Regulated Reading
- Process
- Textual Analysis
- Reading Engagement

We have explained them and provided outcomes for each.

The second charge, we concluded, is not one that this committee can tackle, especially without any representatives from our four year colleges; we had none on this committee. We recommend that this be handled in the same way that the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum was, which is by convening a group to work on transfer over a longer time.

The third charge is similarly difficult to complete without the collaboration of our K-12 colleagues. Particularly in reading, where there is no direct counterpart in high schools, it is going to take a concerted effort and time to decide when and where reading can be taught by direct instruction in a high school system where almost no students actually take a reading class. Where, exactly, would the college ready reading skills line up with high school coursework? This committee recommends that a cross-system group work together on this charge.

Introduction

Developmental Education is contextual, meaning that any student whose skills do not meet the expectations of a college or program will be at risk. There will always be students who perform at the low end of the curve. There is no “typical” developmental student. They come to our institutions less prepared and thus, less able to succeed. In MnSCU, the students who come to our open admissions colleges and place into developmental reading display a broad range of skills and experiences that reflect many of society’s ills: generational poverty, unstable housing, gaps in education, undiagnosed disabilities that affect learning and attention, and little background experience in the ways of higher education. These are complex and interrelated issues that must be addressed in multifaceted approaches and pedagogies.

The English subgroup of the Developmental Education Content Committee has submitted their report which eloquently frames the context of developmental education (Coleman, et al). We encourage this audience to read that report first. In it they acknowledge the social context of teaching developmental students, as well as the fact that students can and do graduate from high schools without meeting colleges’ “college ready” standards, despite the best efforts of our colleagues in the K12 system. The social and systemic problems make it impossible to succeed with every student. We, like our English colleagues, believe that students can improve their skills and make their lives better by attending our colleges, even if they start at a level below “college ready.”

Developmental reading students reflect a diverse demographic. Not only, according to Asmussen (*Charting 9-10*), do they represent a disproportionate number of students of color and other underrepresented groups, they also represent a large range of ages. Many have been out of high school for years, and a substantial subset never went to high school at all. We believe that the non-traditional students will continue to be an important part of our enrollments, and that although looking to align with high school standards may seem like a panacea, it does not address the large numbers of students who have long breaks between attending the two systems.

Access was the buzzword of higher education in the past, but *graduation* is our current operative word. There are no people more interested in seeing our students complete their program of study than those who teach them. We do not wish upon them endless coursework that counts for nothing, nor do we wish for them to reach their financial aid cap before they are finished with their programs and majors. However, we also do not want our students, who have already had many negative experiences with school, to fail because we neglect to teach them the skills they need for success. We know what they need, and we absolutely must give it to them. To have open admissions policies, but not provide the necessary instruction at the lower levels of our entering students is unethical indeed.

Reading is the skill underlying most other academic endeavors, including mathematics, (*Redesigning 133*). If students begin college without the skills to read and understand college level texts, technical manuals, primary resources, academic articles, and literary essays, they will not succeed. Furthermore, many college courses use multiple choice testing as a major assessment, and multiple choice tests are, first and foremost, reading tests. Developmental students are not skilled at navigating the precise and specialized use of language that these tests employ. For these reasons, we believe it is in the best interests of our students to have opportunities to improve their reading skills while they are in college.

Recommendations

Multiple Measures

Before considering what type of support is most appropriate for our students, this committee urges MnSCU to begin with placement testing, the Accuplacer, and the current practice of using one measure to place students into courses. Faculty have pressed for the use of multiple measures for a long time. It is clear from *Getting Prepared 2014* (Fergus 14) that MnSCU is aware of the rate of error in course placement when the Accuplacer is the sole measure. However, the use of significant multiple measures has not been integrated into our intake policies at this writing.

Professional instruction

This committee believes that students with the most risk factors must have highly qualified professionals as teachers, advisers, and other support staff. Too often, resources for these students are fragmented and staffed with temporary professionals. Thus, we are concerned about the bills in the legislature that would have “tutors” be the reading professionals. Furthermore, we know that supplementary programs do not provide students with a **curriculum** that will systematically teach them how to work with the various texts they are using in a college course.

By nature, tutoring or directed group study (usually review sessions) are **reactive** in nature. In other words, students come to a session and present their “problem,” and the tutor attempts to address it. An issue with this model is twofold: first, students don’t know how to ask the questions because they are confused. They may say, “I just don’t get it,” so the tutor is led to believe the problem is content related, and subsequently reviews the concept at hand. It’s a bit of a guessing game to figure out if that “fixes” the problem, at least in the short term. But the second issue is that the tutor isn’t an expert in the role of reading in the task at hand, and often that is the crux of the problem, not the actual concept. Teaching a student how to navigate a text is what reading professionals do in the classroom. It involves both diagnosis and correction, and it takes time. It is a carefully constructed curriculum, not a hit and miss approach. The teacher needs to be familiar with both the content and the reading tasks within the content to really help a student learn the necessary college reading skills. This is one example of best practice in reading instruction: the co-requisite reading/college content course model which is being used at several of our colleges. It does work, but is most helpful for students on the cusp of “college-ready,” not for our lowest level students. The students in that lowest level do not have the ability to keep up with a college content course in terms of either pace or difficulty level, and thus would be at greater risk if they are pushed into the college curriculum immediately. It would serve those students better to immerse them into a reading course and a first year experience course, allowing them to begin to understand the college system while they practice the reading strategies in a less risky environment.

There are many other aspects of a developmental reading curriculum that address other needs of the students. Students often have little computing experience, and they are not often familiar with online course management systems, such as Desire 2 Learn (D2L). They often do not understand how college works and how to navigate this system. Many students have life issues that compete with their time and energy, and therefore, it is helpful if the students’ advisers and instructors have a close working relationship and can work together to connect the students to the appropriate resources.

Cost Concerns

Colleges are very cost conscious; they look deliberately and often for ways to reduce the costs of instruction. A concern of this committee is that any attempt to substitute lower paid tutors for faculty will be, however tempting, disastrous for students. We are particularly wary of the legislature's proposal to use "supplemental" types of instruction that would supplant courses. It would be likely that colleges would quickly move to a method that would lower costs, rather than maintaining qualified faculty. Additionally, the notion of charging students for these supplemental services (only developmental students, according to the bills) would be impossible to actually carry out. This committee firmly believes that the faculty should be teaching students the necessary skills for success in college.

College-Ready Reading

The word "contextual" is a repeating theme in this committee's discussions. Reading is highly contextual. A person may be a very skilled reader in one context and a completely inept one in another. Here is an example:

At this stage, I will have a flexible tool capable of modeling individual galaxies as they grow via smooth accretion of diffuse IGM gas, subject only to internal feedback processes. The primary outputs of this code will be the luminosity of galaxies as a function of time, halo of mass, and rest-frame emission band, from which LF predictions will follow immediately. However, the evolution of the faint galaxy population, as predicted by my models, will not be constrained by JWST at redshifts much higher than $z \sim 8$. Because of this, I will focus next on how the sky-averaged 21-cm signal may be used to constrain galaxies too faint to be detected by JWST.

The 21-cm "spin flip" transition results from hyperfine splitting in the 1S ground state of the hydrogen atom when the magnetic moments of the proton and electron flip between aligned (triplet state) and antialigned (singlet state). The relative number of hydrogen atoms in each state depends sensitively on the temperature and ionization state of the gas, since it is the temperature and ionization state that determine the rate of hydrogen-hydrogen and hydrogen-electron collisions capable of inducing "spin exchange," i.e., flipping from one hyperfine state to the other. Spin exchange can also be caused by more subtle radiative processes, depending on the abundance of Ly- α photons (Wouthuysen, 1952, Field, 1958). (Excerpt from Mirocha, J., NSF Proposal 2014)

Unless one has knowledge of astrophysics, and the specialized area within, the above excerpt is very challenging—if not impossible—to understand. The combination of background knowledge, acronyms, and specialized vocabulary makes this text "dense" in reading lingo. Background knowledge deeply affects our comprehension, and developmental students generally have very little background knowledge in the academic subjects they will study. For our developmental reading students, readings from courses such as Introductory Sociology are just as difficult. Part of the challenge is providing students with some background to fill in the gaps.

There is a movement called "Disciplinary Reading" which is an effort to help content experts do more to actively teach the reading techniques pertinent to their disciplines (see Kamil, et al). This is certainly an important effort, but when students have actual reading difficulties, it is not enough. Content instructors

are experts in their fields, not in reading. Reading instructors who teach paired classes with college content courses use the identified reading strategies that match the particular discipline, as well as provide practice with other related texts to reinforce those skills.

As with writing (see Coleman) reading is also holistic: many processes are working at once to produce comprehension. Automaticity, defined as “a reader’s ability to recognize words without conscious decoding” (Beers, 2015), is one aspect of reading fluency. But just recognizing words accurately and quickly does not lead to comprehension in college level texts. Construction of meaning depends on the context, and therefore, a great deal of practicing in different contexts is necessary to become an accomplished reader. Even a freshman “college-ready” student actually has a big challenge moving from one introductory course to another, each time shifting to a different set of literacy requirements. Imagine the difficulty of the inexperienced developmental reader.

Four Key Areas of Reading Success in College

Our committee has agreed on four broad areas of reading that are essential for successful college reading. We explain them below in a format similar to the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum model, with an eye toward a future discussion of creating a similar transfer agreement for developmental reading courses in MnSCU.

Area 1: Independent and Self-Regulated Reading

College courses expect reading to be done outside of class and independently. Sometimes a lecture will directly reinforce the content of the text; other times the lecture augments it. Therefore, the reading task requires students to manage the reading load and pace, understand the key concepts, vocabulary, and explanations. High school students, unless involved in college preparatory curricula, do not experience the kind of independent reading that college students are expected to perform and have not practiced this skill. It involves:

- The ability to read fluently and proficiently for sustained periods.
- Metacognitive skills and self-awareness of comprehension.
- Adjustment of strategies and rate as needed to enhance comprehension.

Area 2: Process

Reading involves a set of strategies that are ever-changing, depending on the text and the reader. It may include stopping and rereading a particularly difficult section, looking up words in the dictionary, or checking some other resource. The process includes:

- Appropriate use of active reading strategies, such as previewing, note making and questioning.
- Use of strategies for handling new vocabulary, such as analyzing word parts and context, or looking a word up in a glossary or dictionary.
- Appropriate time management for handling heavy loads and fast paced reading.
- Use of instructor feedback to inform the refinement of reading strategies.

Area 3: Textual Analysis

In order to manage complex readings, students need to make good use of the way text is structured. For example, if the content is classifying information, it helps if the student attends to the characteristics that make up the various “types” that are being discussed. There are several commonly used structures in expository text: *cause/effect*, *classification*, *comparison/contrast*, *problem/solution*, *chronological order*, *process order*, *spatial order*, and *description/listing* are examples of major patterns. These organizational structures frame the relationships between ideas that are critical to understanding concepts (real comprehension is not simply a long list of random factoids to be memorized). Aspects of textual analysis include:

- Awareness of patterns of text structure (delineated above).
- Recognition of key words and phrases that signal the use of a pattern.
- Recognition of the relationships between sub-parts of a concept or set of concepts.
- Application of inferential thinking when making connections.
- Identification of multiple points of view.
- Employment of a problem solving approach to text analysis.
- Recognition of purpose and tone; differentiation between fact and opinion; identification of bias.
- Analysis of the development of key ideas or themes of a text.
- Summarization skills which identify all central ideas of a text and important explanations or extensions.
- Analysis of inter-text relationships (how sentences, paragraphs, or sections of a text relate to each other and to the whole).

Area 4: Reading Engagement

This broad area includes a number of behaviors and attitudes toward reading and academic tasks. Developmental students, with limited productive experience in academic settings, need to practice these behaviors in order to develop the *Habits of Mind* that are necessary for success in college. (Coleman 8 and Conley). David Conley, author of *College Knowledge*, describes those habits as “critical thinking, analytical thinking, and problem solving; an inquisitive nature; willingness to accept critical feedback; openness to possible failures; and the desire to cope with frustrating and ambiguous learning tasks” (2). Note that none of these habits is specific to any discipline, including reading. They are *learned behaviors or attitudes* toward learning and thinking. In the reading curriculum, we model and teach these new behaviors:

- Develop flexibility in reading for different types of texts.
- Understand the different purposes for reading, such as study reading as opposed to reading in order to elaborate on ideas or respond to reading.
 - Study reading requires deep and accurate reading, for example.
- Use reading as a means of continuing one’s learning and expanding one’s point of view.
- Use independent reading for various purposes in college and work.
 - Develop a habit for recreational reading or personal reading.
- Demonstrate general student success behaviors.

- Including, but not limited to time management, goal setting, attendance, participation in class activities and discussions, timeliness in work habits, tolerance for ambiguity, and openness to feedback.

Transfer of Developmental Reading Courses

Like our English colleagues, we would support a method and process that allows students to transfer their developmental coursework if they should move to another MnSCU institution. We know that our students currently must retake the Accuplacer in order to “prove” that they learned the skills that were taught in their previous reading courses. Unfortunately, the Accuplacer is not a test that is designed for measuring “exit competencies.” We recommend that students not be required to take the Accuplacer if they transfer before or after completing their developmental reading requirements. A better method might be using multiple measures. For example, students might take a final exam from the new institution’s reading course, or to meet with an adviser to determine if “credit for prior learning” might be appropriate. A designee on each campus who handles transfer appeals should work with the local reading faculty to determine if a particular reading course has met their course goals.

Our committee, as we pooled all of the course outcomes we currently have, discovered that the different campuses have created varying reading courses and levels. Each campus has attempted to meet the needs of its community of learners, as well as the programs/majors that are offered. We cannot envision a time when one model of delivery, such as supplemental instruction, could successfully be applied to all campuses. We can, however, envision a set of agreements, much like the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, which allows students to seamlessly transfer and move on with their educations without repeating courses or experiencing unnecessary hurdles, such as retaking the Accuplacer.

This committee realized that the task of figuring out that agreement is a much larger job than we had time for in four meetings. We suggest, as our English colleagues have also suggested (Coleman 11) that MnSCU appoint a team of faculty representing all types of institutions to create a Developmental Transfer Curriculum. Existing processes, such as *Charting the Future*, may be a vehicle for doing this. The process must allow time for thoughtful and deliberate discussions, for those discussion points to be vetted at the campus level so as to involve as many faculty as possible, and for campuses to retain local control for how to meet the transfer conditions.

Recommendations for Targeted Interventions in K-12

The third directive for this committee is to identify interventions that could be put in place to improve the alignment between the high schools and colleges. We have already noted in this report that many of our students do not come to our colleges directly from high school. On some campuses, that number is as low as 14% (MCTC).

This directive is one that should be fulfilled by collaborating with our feeder high schools. First, our communities across Minnesota do not have the same needs or the same issues. Second, and more importantly, this committee does not feel it is appropriate for college faculty to tell high school teachers how to do their jobs. The conditions for teaching in high schools are very different from those in colleges. The social issues, constant high stakes testing, pressures to graduate students, large class sizes, and many other factors contribute to a teaching environment that is attempting to serve many masters.

We, as college faculty, are not familiar with each high school's particular constraints, and thus our suggestions are likely to be irrelevant.

Many colleges are beginning to explore methods of collaboration with high schools, such as Pathways to Postsecondary. This committee strongly urges a process that will allow for further creation of teams of faculty from high schools and colleges to identify areas in which alignment is optimal and workable. However, very few high school students ever take a reading class, so it is problematic for language arts (English) courses and reading courses to directly align. For example, college reading curricula emphasizes textbook (expository) materials because that forms the bulk of college students' reading tasks. High school English teachers focus on literature and writing. Trying to align course outcomes results in a Venn diagram with a very small overlapping area.

Conclusion

Although this committee understands the concern that too many students are not ready to succeed with college coursework upon high school graduation (or college entry), we return to the notion that there will always be students who will need more help with their learning skills than others. Our two-year colleges in MnSCU are open admissions schools with missions that clearly focus on accepting students where they are. We cannot accept students into our colleges and then refuse to give them the courses that will meet their needs. The national conversation, should it gain traction, about the role of community and technical colleges may put us all in the position of serving even a broader range and complexity of student needs. Many of the community/technical colleges across the MnSCU system are holding their own conversations about what the redesign of developmental education means to them and their institutions. Clearly, we are all focused on ways that we can best meet the needs of the students who come to our campuses without forcing them into circumstances that add time or expense to their college experience. We feel the recommendations in this report put us in a position to do so.

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