

**Los Medanos College
Developmental Education Program
Professional Development**

Research/Effective Practice

In *What Works* (2002), Boylan cites several studies that highlight the impact of professional development and training on student success. He concludes, “No matter what component of developmental education was being studied, an emphasis on training and professional development improved its outcomes” (p.46). Programs with a strong professional development component yield better student retention rates and better student performance in developmental courses than programs without this focus. (Boylan, Bonham, Claxton, and Bliss, 1992). The evidence is clear. Successful developmental education programs make staff development a priority, and make sure that adjunct faculty participate in professional development activities.

Nowhere is professional development more imperative than in the design and delivery of basic skills education. Norton Grubb, author of *Honored But Invisible: An Inside Look at Teaching in Community Colleges* (1999), is critical of the “skills and drills” approach that historically has dominated remedial coursework. He refers to this as a behaviorist approach, and agreeing with the philosophy espoused by Bartholomae and Petrosky, states that “implicitly instructors in this tradition assume that literacy and numeracy are individual skills, following a set of formulaic rules, rather than forms of social communication and practices where individuals must have a deeper understanding of the purposes of reading, writing and mathematics in different settings” (Grubb, p. 3). The latter he refers to as constructivist approaches that are student-centered and meaning-centered. In the absence of structured opportunities to engage in dialogue about good teaching practices and to construct coherent philosophies of teaching that emphasize meaning-making, individual instructors are more likely to turn to conventional approaches with which they are most familiar. He states

Thus the very absence of discussions about pedagogy within a college and the absence of any institutional mechanisms to prepare developmental instructors (especially part-timers) are indications that instruction has veered in the direction of skills and drills. Instead, community colleges that want to improve the quality of their developmental programs need to have explicit discussions about pedagogy, explicit agreements and mechanisms to move those agreements into practice. (p.4)

The characteristics of effective professional development are well-documented in the literature and summarized concisely in The University of Delaware's [Education Policy Brief](#). Specifically, professional development that improves student learning is content-focused, extended, collaborative, part of daily work, ongoing, coherent and integrated, inquiry-based, teacher-driven, informed by student performance and has a self-evaluation component.

The research suggests that the typical list of inservice workshops offered twice a year for community college faculty will not have significant impact on improving student learning. Citing a national study of effective professional development programs from the *American Educational Research Journal*, Boylan writes in [What Works](#) "the 'one shot' professional development activity is far less effective than a sustained and intensive series of professional development activities undertaken over time. Furthermore, effective professional development should involve a combination of general instructional or service delivery strategies and those which are subject specific." (p.47) Rarely do community college inservice workshops focus on student learning of specific subject matter. Mary Kennedy, in [Form and Substance in Inservice Teacher Education](#), analyzed the impact of inservice programs for math teachers on student attainment of basic skills and higher-level problem-solving skills. She concludes "programs that focus on subject matter knowledge and on student learning of particular subject matter are likely to have larger positive effects on student learning than are programs that focus mainly on teaching behaviors."(p.11)

In *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success* effective practices C.1 through C.5 focus on staff development.

LMC Current Practice (2007)

The primary approach we have taken to sustaining the developmental education initiatives is the establishment of Teaching Communities. Our teaching communities are based on:

- Collaborative investigations into student learning
- Content-based staff development
- An assessment cycle based on student learning outcomes
- Integration of research and best practice into curriculum and pedagogy

Teaching Communities meet throughout the semester to investigate some aspect of teaching and learning. Frequently, they are comprised of faculty teaching the same course and are focused on a collaboratively developed research question, though we have also experimented with seminars on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in which faculty pursue individual classroom-based research projects. Faculty participating in a Teaching Community are often required to apply concepts learned from the discussion of assigned readings in math or English education literature by producing artifacts such as lesson plans, class activities, an analysis of student work, or a course portfolio.

Some of our Teaching Communities have documented improvements in student learning as a result of their work. The [English 70 Teaching Community](#) that implemented the [Reading Apprenticeship](#) produced impressive gains in students' ability to summarize and respond to assigned readings. Intermediate Algebra students have shown significant gains in communication, problem-solving, and use of multiple representations as a result of the collaborative work of a [Math 30 Teaching Community](#) that focused on writing classroom activities. Other Teaching Communities have conducted inquiry that surfaced the need for more in-depth study, such as the group of instructors working on grammar pedagogy

or the [prealgebra Teaching Communities](#) that are applying the findings of math education research in an attempt to improve their students' understanding of concepts related to proportional reasoning.

Faculty participation in Teaching Communities is supported by the college with an annual budget of \$24,600 divided evenly between math and English.

References

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