

Community College Library Practices in Developmental Education

By Ann Roselle

Results of the study also begin to fill a knowledge gap in developmental education.

ABSTRACT. *This qualitative study examines current community college library practices in developmental education. Based on semistructured telephone interviews with 27 librarians across the United States, analysis of the results shows that there are librarians who proactively integrate basic library skills into developmental education and academic success courses, collaborate with developmental educators in designing library sessions and class assignments, interact with learning assistance and tutoring centers, and help reduce library anxiety and build student confidence.*

One common discovery over years of developmental education research is that successful programs incorporate a variety of support services for students, along with developmental coursework (Boylan, 2002; Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997; Casazza, 1999; Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan, & Davis, 2007; McCabe, 2003; McCabe, 2000; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Roueche, Ely, & Roueche, 2001; Saxon & Boylan, 2007). Although support services such as counseling, tutoring, academic advising, study skills workshops, orientations, and Supplemental Instruction are frequently mentioned as key components to a comprehensive developmental program, discussions of library services are noticeably absent from the developmental education literature time and time again.

Thirty-years ago, Patricia Breivik (1977) wrote:

The educationally disadvantaged students who enter our colleges today have many problems confronting them. Counseling services, specially designed courses, and communication skill centers have been established across the country to support their efforts; but educational literature is singularly lacking in consideration of the role of academic libraries in this process. (p. 46)

Over 30-years later, the role of academic librarians in developmental education is still not recognized.

A search of the library science literature on the roles of academic libraries in developmental education reveals it is equally incomplete. The

bulk of library science writings are case studies at individual colleges describing how the library is incorporated into a specific developmental course (De Jong & Eckard, 2005; Embry, 1990; Farrell 2004; Houck, 1988; Ramey, 1985; Sorensen, 1988; Suarez, 1985). Additional case studies involve collaborative efforts between the library and an English skills lab (Schneider & Fuhr, 1982) and a unique situation where a library director administers a developmental education program (Gerhardt, 1986). Actual research studies (Affleck, 1992; Phifer & Person, 1983; Rippey & Truett, 1983) are limited in number and old, and they generally discover minimal involvement of academic libraries in developmental education programs. The remaining publications from the literature search (Holleman, Todaro-Cagle, & Murray, 1990; Thomas, 2000) are primarily focused on making “a call” for more active participation by academic libraries.

This qualitative research study examines how community college librarians are currently participating in developmental education programs. This research topic provides information to help developmental educators create or revise developmental education programs that include librarians. Results of the study also begin to fill a knowledge gap in developmental education, reflected by the absence of information about academic library integration in the developmental education literature.

Method

Participants

Through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), a select group of academic librarians were identified who had a high likelihood of knowledge and experience with a range of library services for developmental students. The sample of librarians was chosen from “best practices” colleges (Boylan, 2002; McCabe, 2003; Roueche, Ely, & Roueche, 2001), published library case studies, and postings for exemplary library contributions to developmental education on CJC-L (community college librarians discussion forum) and LRNASST-L (learning assistance discussion forum). Forty librarians were invited to participate. Sixty-seven percent (27) accepted.

Ann Roselle
Faculty Librarian
Phoenix College
1202 W. Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85013
ann.roselle@pcmail.maricopa.edu

Procedure

Semistructured telephone interviews were conducted with 27 librarians (22 female, 5 male) during November and December 2007. The librarians worked at 25 community colleges from 18 different U.S. states. The institutional affiliations represented by those interviewed vary in type of location (city, suburban, and town) and size (1,700 students to 38,000 students). When such information was known to them (55% of respondents), librarians reported 30% to 95% of students at their institutions test at a developmental level in at least one subject area.

The telephone interviews lasted, on average, 45 minutes. The researcher asked librarians to answer 20 questions about their experiences with developmental educators, learning assistance centers, tutoring centers, library services for developmental students, and professional development in developmental education. Secondary, probing questions were also asked during the course of these interviews. All interviews were recorded.

As researcher, I transcribed all of the interviews, and read them multiple times. During the initial readings, I added comments in the margins of the transcriptions and marked out extraneous text that was not pertinent to the purpose of the study. I used cross-case analysis (Patton, 2002) to group together answers to common questions. Then, recurring ideas were color coded using highlighter. As part of the cross-case analysis, the “find” function in word processing was used to search for recurring words or phrases in the transcripts. Based on this systematic analysis of the qualitative data, I identified patterns in current community college library practices in developmental education.

After the interviews, 14 of the librarians shared documentation related to the interview focus with the researcher. The documentation included sample lesson plans, class exercises, course assignments, library handouts, Web site addresses, and internal reports. These documents were checked against the transcripts to validate the interview data. The reliability of the data was also supported by the credibility of the researcher: I was trained to conduct qualitative research by renowned social scientists and have published results from other qualitative studies.

Results

Basic Library Skills Instruction

One hundred percent of the librarians interviewed teach basic library skills to developmental education students. Basic library skills include navigating through an academic library, locating items in an academic library, gathering background information, conducting a basic

search in an online resource, evaluating information at a basic level (i.e., facts vs. opinions), and citing sources (Klingberg, 2004). Basic library skills are fundamental for student success at the college level. One hundred percent of the librarians indicate that basic library skills instruction occurred in developmental reading and/or writing courses at their institution. The instruction is either a formal requirement as part of the developmental education curriculum or is provided to classes on an individual instructor basis.

Instruction in Reading Courses

Seventy percent of the librarians interviewed outreach to developmental instructors to integrate basic library skills into developmental reading courses. A librarian explains:

I just got this idea: What if we could do something for the READ10 students. When I looked at their textbook, I did notice that they did something on dictionaries, so I

“We have implemented this sort of multitiered approach.”

proposed the idea of bringing them in for a session. I do a short presentation...we talk about print dictionaries, and...work with online dictionaries. And, then we actually get them into the stacks and pull out [the dictionaries]. The teacher discovered a 14-question worksheet, and they work on that either alone or in pairs....For many of them, this is the first time they are in the library. And, it has worked so nicely that we’ve just kept it going.

Eighty percent of librarians from the sample find that successful integration of basic library skills occurs when the instruction sessions have defined, clear purposes directly related to course activities. A librarian describes the integration in developmental reading:

They are reading essays on different topics, and then they will come and expand their knowledge by finding additional newspaper articles about those topics....Newspapers are very readable, students can digest them, and we can limit their length using [a newspaper database]. When they are studying note taking, they practice on these articles. They use these articles also for comparison...evaluating the articles....They also do have a small research paper to do at the end.

Another librarian integrates basic library skills through three sessions that directly help

developmental students read a novel. Students locate background information on the topic of the novel, identify key events during the novel’s time period, and complete research about the author. The librarian shares the benefits of these sessions:

The instructor...loves this [because] these two first assignments have generated a lot of anticipation about the book. And many of the students on their own just start reading, because they have gotten so interested in the topic and timeline research....I’ve gotten to see the students more than once in the semester, and I can see them actually mastering skills....Several of them wrote at the end of the semester that in another class, when they were assigned a book to read, the first thing they did was come to the library and look up about the author because it helped them understand the book.

Instruction in Writing Courses

Seventy percent of the librarians interviewed also outreach to developmental instructors to integrate basic library skills into developmental writing courses. A librarian explains:

The teacher told me that they are just writing sentences so they can’t do research. I asked the instructor if we could work together to come up with some ideas. She said, “Well, we are going to be writing an essay about how to do something.” And, I have [a simple article database], and so we just emphasized that one database for the students to use....Even though they were at a very basic level, we did teach them something worthwhile by just using one resource in the library to help them write an essay.

Fifty-two percent of the librarians interviewed apply multiple library sessions, instead of an isolated “one-shot” session to integrate basic library skills instruction. Multiple sessions provide librarians with opportunities to review material and time for students to practice their library skills. A librarian describes a multiple sessions approach for developmental writing:

We have implemented this sort of multitiered approach. [The first session] would be very assignment specific like biographical references. How do you find out about an author’s background? We believe in scaffolding, building upon prior knowledge. So, then I would come back in later on in the semester...we’d have a little review. Remember, how we used these biographical databases? We’ll take that same skill you learned, and we’re going to apply it to [this other database]. Now, we’re going to look for a concept as opposed to a person [for your five-page research paper].

Another librarian shares the use of technology in multiple library sessions for developmental writing:

[Students] do a description paper where they look at a picture and write about what they see. We show them how to use [a historical photograph Web site]. And, we show them how to use [Web image searching]. They must find a black and white photograph from American history from 1960 or older....They like the technology and looking at the photographs. Their first writing assignment is to just describe what they see and read into it a little bit. For their second assignment, they come back to the library. The students use [online specialized encyclopedias] to look up something on American history that is related to their picture. They get a fact or two from history that they can relate to their picture. And, of course, they have to cite it and write a paragraph or two.

Instruction in Academic Success Courses

Eighty-four percent of the librarians indicate that basic library skills are also taught in academic success courses. These courses are often required for developmental education students. Of these librarians, 60% explain that library integration is mandatory in these courses. In six cases, the librarian is the formal instructor for the entire academic success course. A librarian describes multiple sessions for an academic success course:

They come in for three classes....It's me teaching it, although we are very much a team, the teacher and I, deciding what sources we want to cover and what kinds of questions we'll ask on the [daily] activity sheet. And, then they have a final assignment [bibliography]....It is much more than a one-shot instruction session; but it is still geared towards probably the beginning student...how do you find a book,...an article...the difference between databases and free Web sites, and...plagiarism. Things that they will need to know in other classes where they'll need to do research.

Another case involves a group of librarians who teach an entire month of 12 library sessions for all sections of an academic success course. One of these librarians witnesses the benefits of this set-up:

One of the most rewarding things to see later on is when they are in their [college-level English classes], and they are at the computers with their cohorts, and they are teaching their fellow students how to use the databases. Because their fellow students maybe only got the one-shot deal...whereas, they

got the whole month of intensive repetition, which they need. Review and a lot more one-on-one. That is the rewarding time when you see them back in the library showing their friends how to use databases.

Characteristics of Basic Library Skills Instruction

Common patterns in basic library skills instruction sessions surface through analysis of the interviews. Librarians incorporate a variety of teaching methods—including active learning, class discussion, group work, and scaffolding—which often mirror student's learning experiences in developmental education classes. Instruction is also simplified, especially when compared to instruction for English composition courses or discipline-specific research courses. Developmental students are introduced to a limited number of resources that are easier to read and use, instead of the entire gamut of library resources. Librarians also focus on teach-

The librarian is the formal instructor for the entire academic success course.

ing one thing at a time. Although instruction is simplified, developmental students still have opportunities for critical thinking. For example, students are asked to determine which resources are most appropriate for particular information needs, to assess the quality of information from Web sites, and to evaluate the usefulness of articles from databases. A librarian explains:

In developmental classes, we spend more time on critiquing whether a source is credible or not, because those students are very apt to be the ones who will just grab anything and not really think, "Is this something I can actually use?" They are less likely to think about "point of view" of a source.

Reducing Student Library Anxiety

Library anxiety can impede successful library use. Fifty-nine percent of the librarians indicate that, in library instruction sessions for developmental students, they focus on (a) creating positive student attitudes towards the library, (b) adapting students to an academic library environment, and (c) increasing student confidences in their library abilities. A librarian shares:

It is important for us to help developmental education students feel that the library is a place that is there to help them succeed. I specifically address this with the developmental education students, who often have

had a negative experience....It is amazing. The instructors come back to the classroom, and we hear again and again that coming [for library instruction] has just done a world of good for the students in terms of making them feel comfortable in the library.

Another librarian explains a tactic used to address library anxiety:

We have them come into the library the first week....They work in groups. Each group has a set of questions about the library that they have to answer...in 15 minutes. Then they come back to the group as a whole...explain what they saw, what they did....By the end of class, they've put together this jigsaw of what the library looks like....We see many of these students use the library after the class is over....Many of them are very comfortable coming into the library, talking to us afterwards, asking us questions, after they've been in our library class.

Reducing library anxiety is also considered important by developmental educators:

[The reading teacher] was very aware of the students' attitudes towards the library. We talked about the fact that just her bringing them in here three times would create a familiarity and lessen the fear....She had them write a half page letter on what they thought about the library stuff that they did. And, the quotes we got from those letters were just mind blowing, like "I used to be afraid of the library, but now I know I can do this!"...You could actually see it in the students as the semester went on....Their body language is just really comfortable.

Instructor-Librarian Collaboration in Designing Instruction Sessions

Of librarians interviewed, 85% collaborate with developmental education and academic success instructors when creating basic library skills instruction sessions. A librarian explains:

We work with them [instructors] to develop library instruction sessions that really speak to the needs of their students...to the reading level, the level of comprehension that the students have. We make sure that the students get to know the library. It is part of helping the students change their experience in college in general. We also make sure that the instruction engages the students. I think we work together to do a lot of that.

Another librarian shares:

[The reading instructor] came to me and said, "When I bring my low level classes in,

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and you do just a general introduction to the library...it is meaningless to them." She said, "I see a real need for them to apply these skills...you and I need to work together so that they're visiting the library not once, but several times." . . . It is very rewarding to find a faculty member that walks into your office, sits down, and says, "You know, I want to do something more."

Instructor-Librarian Collaboration in Designing Assignments

Collaboration with instructors when creating assignments is done by 60% of librarians interviewed. A librarian describes collaboration in reviewing an academic success course textbook:

The textbook they purchased had a library assignment in it. So, we contacted the faculty and worked with them. I was very dismayed because the textbook used Dewey [instead of Library of Congress call numbers].... We were concerned about that, because you don't want to say to the student, "Read Chapter 3, and then ignore half of it." What we did was meet with the faculty members, go over the chapter, decide what out of the chapter was going to be their assignment, and then we talked about that assignment in the context of our library.

During collaboration, 45% of the librarians explicitly mention the importance of designing library assignments that have a high probability of student success to increase student confidences in their abilities. To help ensure success, students are given time during class to complete the assignments. The librarians and instructors also work together to make sure that the topics in class can be supported by the library collections. Typically, students are asked to use only one or two sources to complete an assignment. The librarians and instructors are especially careful to design assignments with clear step-by-step instructions. A librarian explains:

The librarians tend to be a lot more involved in the creation of the assignments...Maybe in other departments instructors will say, "Okay, well if my handout is a little bit out of date, the students will figure it out." The developmental educators know that they have to be really clear with their instructions....I went out to lunch with one of the instructors....She wanted to talk extensively with me before the students came in to make sure that the library had all the resources to support the assignment and that it was within their capabilities.

Librarian Collaboration with Learning Assistance and Tutoring Centers

The interviews show signs that librarians are also beginning to collaborate with learning assistance and tutoring centers in order to help students more. One librarian reports that volunteer librarians help students in the tutoring center, and four librarians mention that they have in place regular training sessions for tutors. A librarian explains:

At the beginning of the semester, we do some training with the tutors on how to use the library databases and the catalog. We have a neighboring 4-year college campus, and so I think sometimes a number of our tutors tend to use their catalog and Web site. So, we've tried to do some more work with them to orient them to our resources.

Two librarians report that they teach library workshops that are sponsored by their campus tutoring centers. Student attendance at these

"Just a general introduction to the library...is meaningless to them."

workshops is low unless instructors require the workshop or offer extra-credit for attendance. Two other librarians mention Web-based collaborative projects. One is for a tutoring center and the other is for a retention department. A librarian explains:

Our retention resources coordinator [oversees learning center]...wanted to have a Web page with information resources for retention. So, I volunteered to help....It is going to be on the library's Web site, but it is retention resources. And, it has different Web links...but also it has specific items in the [library] collection that would help faculty and staff with resources for helping students. And, then, we're going to have a blog on there, highlighting any different articles or materials that have arrived lately.

Five librarians comment on the benefits of their libraries being in close proximity to learning assistance and tutoring centers to build relationships and make referrals. A librarian shares:

The learning center is exactly next to the library....The only thing that separates us is an open door and a glass wall....We send students to the tutoring center when they say, "I need someone to read my paper and see if there are any mistakes in it." If they are in the tutoring center and they say, "I need someone to help me with my citations or I need

to do more research on this," they send them over here. There is only that glass partition that separates us, so that they can look over at us, and we can look over at them....Students can even bring reference books back and forth easily.

Professional Relationships of Librarians and Instructors

The librarians interviewed share reasons why collaboration occurs with developmental education instructors. The reasons center on librarians having common student experiences similar to developmental education instructors and respecting the teaching skills of these instructors. A librarian reflects, "It is easy because they are like us. We are like-minded, so we tend to gravitate together." Another librarian expresses:

I think there is a closeness there. I think in the library, a lot of times just by default, we get a lot of the developmental students who are at wits' end and have nowhere else to go. When we are interacting with students, the vast majority of them are those types of students. So, I think in that sense, we have a kinship with the developmental educators, because we're all dealing with the same group.

Another librarian comments:

The students are pretty discouraged that they have to take this developmental class before they can do what they really want to do. So, I think in that way I feel a kind of solidarity with the developmental instructors because that is the same thing in the library. No one wants to go to a library instruction session. [laughter]

Librarians voice a respect for developmental educators, both in terms of their willingness to work together and their commitment to student learning. A librarian points out:

We have some great developmental education instructors. They work very hard, and they've got a lot of resources and knowledge in working with students. Rarely do I see assignments that I think are not going to engage the student.

Another librarian shares:

I began sitting in the developmental classes because I didn't even know what they were doing in there. One of the things I noticed is how good those teachers are. I thought if I ever had teachers like this growing up or in college, Wow! How much further I would have been! They are so extraordinary in their teaching skills.

Four librarians have copresented with developmental educators at professional conferences.

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A librarian shares a positive experience:

I presented with one of the reading teachers at a conference...about a class we do together. And, we made a little packet with the handouts that we use and the assignment sheets and worksheets and so on. And, then, we did a presentation...Yeah, that was fun! It was mostly reading teachers and people who worked in tutoring labs. And, the people who were in our session said, "Oh, this is great. I wish the librarians at our campus could do this."

Discussion and Implications

Developmental students are learning basic library skills in developmental education and academic success courses to prepare them for college-level coursework. This early contact teaches students how to take advantage of library resources for their learning. Integrating the library with academic success courses is particularly appropriate, since research shows a relationship between frequency of library use and the development of effective study skills (Osequera, 2007). In addition, a basic skills approach, including critical thinking, is aligned with developmental education strategies (Roueche & Roueche, 1999). Librarians also report that during these instruction sessions, they address affective behaviors, like library anxiety, that can impact student learning. This, too, is very much aligned with general teaching principles in developmental education (Smittle, 2003). Research shows successes with library instruction in lowering levels of library anxiety and building student confidences in their abilities (Cleveland, 2004; Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004; Van Scoyoc, 2003).

Developmental students in basic skills library instruction sessions frequently use computers, especially when accessing information. The interviews show that developmental students use online encyclopedias and library article databases, including biographical and newspaper databases, along with freely accessible Web sites. Library instruction sessions are another way to infuse computer literacy into developmental education curriculum. Technical skills in accessing and managing information are necessary for students throughout their college career. Kuh and Vesper (2001) have analyzed student responses from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). CSEQ is an assessment tool used by hundreds of U.S. universities and colleges since 1979 to measure the quality of student experiences, including student perceptions of their campuses and their personal progress toward educational goals. According to the researchers' analysis (2001) of the third edition of

CSEQ, students who more frequently use computers and information technology in college report more progress in terms of personal, social, and intellectual competencies.

Although longevity of practices is not a focus of this research, several librarians comment that their work with developmental education courses started over 5 years ago. In one institution, starting over 2 decades ago, library assignments are designed for every developmental education course. Although there is evidence of enduring library instruction embedded into developmental education courses, the interviews illustrate fewer advances in collaborative efforts with learning assistance and tutoring centers. However, at the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) 2008 Conference, a librarian and tutoring director did present on a new partnership program (Smith & Pennel, 2008). This may be a model for future collaboration. The practices reflected in the interviews of this qualitative study may inspire develop-

"Administrators and faculty have largely overlooked one of the major tools available to them for promoting academic success."

mental educators and learning assistance professionals to integrate the library into their own developmental education programs. Findings of this study indicate that collaboration efforts are likely to be successful because of the feelings of kinship and respect that librarians have for developmental educators.

Recently, the Center for Student Success (2007) has examined basic skills education among California community colleges and has developed a guide to effective practices. Although basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and studying have been included, basic library skills are absent from the guide. The publication of yet another developmental education guide without specific mention of library skills is disappointing and could be easily remedied. Developmental educators and librarians should more vigorously communicate their successes on-campus and educate the broader developmental education community about these contributions. Research by Kuh and colleagues (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Clark, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Whitt, 2005; Kuh & Gonyea, 2003; Kuh & Vesper, 2001) has taken the lead in demonstrating ways in which academic libraries contribute to student success, but there is still much to be

explored. Empirical research is needed on academic libraries and student success within the realm of developmental education.

Conclusion

Thirty years ago, Breivick (1977) wondered if the absence of discussion about academic libraries in educational literature is because they "have nothing beyond their traditional, fairly passive postures to offer these students, or that administrators and faculty have largely overlooked one of the major tools available to them for promoting academic success of the educationally disadvantaged students" (p. 46). This research shows that community college libraries are actively participating in developmental education programs. Through proactive outreach, librarians provide basic library skills instruction to students in developmental reading, developmental writing, and academic success courses. Librarians collaborate with developmental educators to design specialized instruction sessions and library assignments that have a high probability of student success. Librarians have also begun collaborating with learning assistance and tutoring centers to reach out to developmental students in new ways. Through these efforts, librarians help to reduce library anxiety and build overall student self-confidence in learning. The future relationship between community college librarians and developmental students is a promising one.

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Appendix

Telephone Interview Questions

Instruction

1. What library instruction services have been implemented for your developmental education students?
2. Which instruction strategies or techniques have proven to be most effective with developmental students?
3. Have any of your instruction services for developmental students been unsuccessful?
4. Does your instruction address affective behaviors of students?
5. To what extent does your library use self-paced instruction, such as workbooks or online tutorials, with developmental education students?
6. Has a commitment to developmental education impacted the creation of tip sheets or user guides?

Roles and Relationships

7. Describe the degree of collaboration between developmental education faculty and librarians.
8. What roles do the library or the librarians play in a study skills or student success course?
9. Are librarians ever paired with developmental education students? (Mentor role)
10. Are any librarians members of a campus developmental education committee?
11. Do librarians ever volunteer in your learning center or tutor center?

Collections and Planning

12. To what extent are developmental education students factored into your collection development? (Do you have something written specifically about their needs in your collection development policy?)
13. Do you have any defined library goals or objectives for developmental education at your library?
14. To what extent has your library assessed the library's impact on student success, in terms of retention, grades, or persistence?

Professional Development

15. Have you participated in any professional development activities related to developmental education?
16. Have you joined any developmental education associations? Listservs?