Chapter 35
"They Didn't Teach Them Anything!"
Learning from Each Other in K–20

Beth Kania-Gosche
Lindenwood University, USA

Sherrie Wisdom
Lindenwood University, USA

Lynda Leavitt
Lindenwood University, USA

ABSTRACT

In the United States, the new Common Core standards intend for every high school senior to graduate "college and career ready." However, the differences between K-12 public schools and higher education extend beyond the curriculum to philosophies of assessment. Rather than blaming each other, K-20 teachers and professors need to learn from each other, recognizing the strengths of each particular context, through an ongoing dialogue and exchange of ideas on instructional practice, rethinking the implementation of Bloom's taxonomy and differentiating instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Transitions between each stage of education are carefully considered in America's educational systems; the goal being a smooth change from one school building to the next. Educators are expected to properly prepare students for the next stage through curriculum design and ongoing as-

sessment. Children today typically attend a short period of time in a pre-school setting to learn socialization and basic skills necessary to enter the more formal learning domain of kindergarten or elementary school. During the transition to middle school, students become impressionable, while educators and parents form a community bond to provide information and interventions to

promote good decision-making processes as their children enter an arena of choices and increased responsibility. The move to the high school setting introduces students to an even greater selection of academic and extra-curricular experiences; ultimately leading to the transition from high school to a post- secondary experience.

The social transition into young adulthood is an issue for concern; however, a deeper discussion has been generated concerning proper academic preparation so students meet the academic rigor of higher education in the United States. The predominant focus has been centered on the lack of skills and sense of readiness. The Common Core standards adopted by many states echo this focus by emphasizing college and career readiness. Today, in 2012, many college graduates are unable to find full time jobs in their field of study (Shierholz, Sabadish, & Wething, 2012). However, adoption of the Common Core in K-12 public education will not solve this problem. Higher education and K-12 education must learn from, rather than blame, each other and understand the differences of each context. The accountability movement in public schools is moving to higher education (Clotfelter, 2012).

K-12 public school students are assessed regularly using common or benchmark tests (Clotfelter, 2012), and all teachers of those students have access to not only this year's results but also those previous. Although legislation requires annual assessments at certain grade levels, many school districts have moved to periodic assessments to better track student progress. Models like Response to Intervention support K-12 students with a variety of services tailored to specific student weaknesses (National Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.). Students are moved in and out of these intervention services as their assessment data indicates progress or the lack thereof. Teachers meet regularly in teams to discuss student data and read resources in Professional Learning Communities. Then these students move to higher education where most assessments

are teacher-created and may vary from section to section. There are rarely interventions or support teams or even standardized assessment data to track student progress from year to year. In addition, data is rarely shared or databases merged from K-12 to higher education (Cunha & Miller, 2012) that track students individually. This makes determining student learning difficult.

However, simply transferring research-based K-12 public school interventions into higher education is implausible. Higher education is undoubtedly more complex than K-12 public schools because of different programs of study and majors and structural differences. Few standardized assessments exist for college students across disciplines, although many discipline-specific accreditations are demanding quantitative evidence of student learning (Clotfelter, 2012). "The professorate instinctively recoils from any suggestion of standardized assessment, for reasons legitimate and otherwise, but more serious attention to this kind of assessment is given the scarcity of resources and the national interest in using those resources effectively" (Clotfelter, 2012, p. 24). Thus, the issue extends beyond the curriculum to assessment techniques, grading philosophies, and teaching styles.

As public school students are assessed more than ever, enrollment in developmental, prerequisite coursework at colleges and universities is rising (Complete College America, 2012). Community colleges and many universities test their students' abilities in the core areas of reading, writing, and math before they can enroll in courses. The type of assessment and the score required for placement vary widely from institution to institution. Depending on their score, students may require additional coursework before they can take courses that will count as graduation requirements. This leaves the students with a sense of defeat before they ever begin.

In contrast, the number of students applying to college with credit from dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, and other means of earning

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