Delta Education Journal

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Spring 2006
College of Education
Delta State University
Cleveland, MS 38733
August 9, 2006

Dear Colleagues,

The accreditation process plays a vital role in determining if programs under review meet the standards acceptable to the profession. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) ensures that educator preparation programs of all types are appropriately rigorous. Featured in this issue of The Delta Education Journal is the Conceptual Framework (CF) for the educator preparation programs under the auspices of the College of Education at Delta State. This document spells out the foundation for all decision-making within the college. We hope that you will review the CF and let us know if you have any suggestions for clarification. We will keep you informed of any alterations to the CF as we prepare for the NCATE visit to the Delta State campus in late March.

We hope that you will find this edition of The Delta Education Journal enjoyable and thought-provoking. Please consider how you can make a contribution to our region and state by providing an article for the next edition of the DEJ. Through collaboration with others, we know that our own ideas are strengthened and given life.

Please let us know if you need additional copies of this edition of the DEJ. If you have questions or comments, please contact me at 662-846-4400 or e-mail lhouse@deltastate.edu.

Sincerely,

Lynn J. House, Ph.D.
Dean
College of Education
August 9, 2006

Dear Colleagues,

*Delta Education Journal* is published by Delta State University, College of Education, in the fall and spring each year. We invite manuscripts that promote teaching, learning, and educational issues. Submissions should follow APA style. For the fall issue, please submit a MS Word file email attachment to shutchen@deltastate.edu by October 1, and for the spring issue, by April 1. If a manuscript is received after a deadline, it will be considered for the next issue.

The *Delta Education Journal* has been a peer-reviewed journal since the Spring of 2005. It consists of a review board as well as the editor. Submissions will be reviewed and evaluated by the board and editor for possible publication in the Journal. Submitting authors will be notified concerning their papers’ acceptance (or rejection) and revisions may be suggested.

We would like to increase the number of submissions in the near future. Thus, we would appreciate your submissions of manuscripts related to learning and teaching. Also, please share this information about the Journal with your colleagues and encourage them to submit manuscripts to the Delta Education Journal. By doing so, your work may be shared with others, new research ideas and teaching strategies may be generated, and the quality and stature of the Journal will increase.

Sincerely,

Scott Alan Hutchens, Ph.D.
Editor
Associate Professor of Psychology
Delta State University
College of Education
Conceptual Framework

Overview

Shared Vision:
Delta State University College of Education (COE) and its community partners in regional, public, and private educational systems have a shared vision of enhancing educational opportunities for all individuals who live and work in the Mississippi Delta. This vision is in accord with that of the university which states that “students will learn and grow in an environment that fosters discovery and creativity.” Delta State University is a regional university that “serves as an educational and cultural hub for the Mississippi Delta,” an area that is rich in cultural diversity. As a regional university, Delta State is committed to providing a quality education and local support for individuals within the region. The cultural and social climate in the area is taken into account when making decisions regarding the philosophies guiding the educational atmosphere at Delta State. The importance of collaboration, problem solving, and encouragement is fully recognized as the university community endeavors to provide candidates with a sound philosophical, theoretical and ethical foundation.

To this end, the College of Education continues to promote a vibrant educational community which serves as a catalyst for lifelong learning in the Mississippi Delta and beyond its borders. The undergraduate programs prepare confident and competent teachers for a range of grade levels and settings. Graduate programs prepare candidates for a variety of professional and leadership roles in diverse educational environments. These roles include teaching, counseling, administration and supervision. Outreach efforts focus on renewing quality teaching within the Mississippi Delta by keeping professionals in the field connected to a broader educational community as well as providing the College of Education with continuous feedback on current needs in education and research. These efforts embody the belief that a professional educator is a life-long learner who engages in reflective practice through interactions within an educational community.

Mission:
The mission of the college (unit) and the conceptual framework are aligned with the mission of the university which partially states, “…the University provides programs and services that promote intellectual, cultural, ethical, physical, and social development. Students from different cultural socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds will develop the ability to respect and evaluate the thoughts of others; to develop, assess, and express their own thoughts effectively; and to use the techniques of research and performance associated with their disciplines.”

As an educational community, the unit supports the following principles as the foundation of its regional mission:

1. *Education is a life long endeavor.* Undergraduate teacher training programs build on the knowledge and experience-base candidates bring with them to college.
A strong liberal arts core curriculum is the foundation to help students become well rounded and culturally literate. The degree-specific course content provides each candidate with opportunities to gain the professional skills/knowledge and to develop dispositions necessary for effective entry level teaching. Graduate programs build on undergraduate training to allow educators to further develop their skills or to redirect into related professional endeavors.

2. *Education is interactive and reflective.* Throughout the educator preparation programs, candidates interact with peers, faculty and community educators, and stakeholders to encourage reflective practice. Candidates are encouraged to improve practice through reflection, critical thinking, and assessment. Candidates carry this process into various educational environments in the spirit of collaboration to energize other educational communities.

3. *Education is culturally contextualized.* Candidates are encouraged to explore their own cultural development and its impact on others while being aware of and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of those with whom they work. A working appreciation for cultural context enhances learning and allows for meaningful relationships with students, peers and administrators.

4. *Education is dynamic.* Unit academic programs are outcomes-driven and responsive to results of comprehensive assessment of individual candidates, courses, programs, field experiences, and the effects of unit efforts on the students in the public and private settings that serve as partners in the Mississippi Delta. Programs are in continuous refinement based on results of multiple assessments.

5. *Education is enhanced by technology.* Technology is infused throughout all programs and services. Technology is viewed not as an end unto itself, but as a valuable tool for communication, content delivery, feedback, and assessment. Technology has become an integral part of faculty practice regarding instructional delivery. Unit assessment systems for individual classes and for program review are increasingly technology-based. Technology is also appreciated as a tool for the educational community to link to the worldwide educational community for research and resources.
The Delta P^3 Model

The shared vision/mission and candidate (college student) proficiencies for the college are illustrated by the Delta P^3 Model. The program platform is the Delta triangle, reflecting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for the development of effective candidates who positively impact student achievement. The Delta symbol is used not only because it symbolizes the geographic region, but also because equilateral triangles are the strongest of polygons. The Delta triangle is an appropriate representation since triangles are stable and can support heavy loads. Additionally, each side of the Delta triangle supports the others; a triangle can only be weakened if one of its sides is lengthened or shortened. These figures combine easily with other polygons to form larger, more complex structures.

Surrounding the Delta triangle are the three critical candidate anchors or components that form the basis of the assessment system: performance, preparation, and professionalism.

1. **Preparation** is the professional training component. Effective candidates must demonstrate proficiencies that verify they have mastered the content of their disciplines, have exhibited competency in the skills necessary to effectively communicate this content to students, and have displayed knowledge of the systems of education including teaching, assessment, classroom management, and decision making.

2. **Performance** is the field-based component of each program. Field experiences are sequenced, intensive, reflective, and require data-driven supervision to ensure candidates’ growth in meeting proficiencies in the skills and dispositions needed to positively impact student learning. Field experiences provide the foundation for
candidates to synthesize their preparation into an effective and dynamic teaching style capable of reaching a diverse student population.

3. **Professionalism** incorporates the proficiencies related to the essential dispositions of a professional educator: compassion, self-reflection, respect for diversity, ethical practice, management of time and resources, creativity, flexibility, appreciation for and commitment to life-long learning, and collaboration

**Coherence**
Each of the three anchors of the conceptual framework is interdependent of the others and forms the basis for ensuring coherence across the entire unit to include curriculum, instruction, field experiences, clinical practice, and assessment of both candidate proficiencies and unit operations. The surrounding outer circle illustrates the role of the Delta Educational Community in ensuring that consistency and coherence are maintained across all programs. The triad of professionalism, preparation, and performance is encircled by the external and internal supports that renew and sustain candidates as they progress professionally through systematic programs of study. These supports include the internal resources provided by Delta State University faculty, staff, and leadership as well as support and feedback provided from external educational partners and alumni.

**Professional Commitments and Dispositions**
The conceptual framework is illustrative of a clear commitment to ensuring that all candidates are educated to be reflective practitioners with the preparation, performance, and professionalism that allows them to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The unit focuses strongly on the dispositions of flexibility, dependability, respect for diversity, initiative, resourcefulness, professional growth, and collaborative behavior. Feedback from community partners indicates strong validation for the importance of the professional commitments and dispositions emphasized throughout all unit programs.

**Commitment to Diversity**
The commitment to diversity runs throughout all programs within the unit, as well as across the university. Specific activities and experiences within each educator preparation program are utilized to ensure appropriate knowledge, skills, and dispositions are in place to allow candidates to positively impact diverse learners. As part of the assessment system, the “Openness to Diversity and Challenge Survey” is also administered to candidates to use as an indicator of those issues surrounding diversity that need further elaboration both within and across programs. As indicated in information provided on both dispositions and in the three anchors of preparation, performance, and professionalism, candidates are expected to demonstrate their capacity for functioning within diverse settings with students and colleagues of varying backgrounds, capabilities, ethnicities, and beliefs. Additionally, as noted throughout the conceptual framework, the university and the unit actively support the recruitment of candidates, faculty, and community affiliations that are representative of the diversity of the region, state, and nation.

**Commitment to Technology**
The effective utilization of technology is infused across all aspects of programs within the unit. This commitment to technology is evidenced in the use of a technology assessment as part of the assessment system for candidates within all programs and in the
conceptual framework as an inclusion in the three anchors of preparation, performance, and professionalism. Candidates are expected to make use of technology in multiple ways to include utilizing WebCT and TaskStream (a web-based data collection tool), communicating with faculty and colleagues, completing PowerPoint presentations, and conducting research. Technology is viewed collectively as a tool for increasing productivity and for positively impacting the learning environment both across the university and within the P-12 setting.

The unit and university support the effective use of technology in all aspects of university life. The university has provided funds for the installation of two “smart classrooms” for the College of Education and has supported “smart carts” for several divisions. Additionally, the university replaced all faculty and staff personal computers during the 2005-2006 academic year, while the college purchased technology-friendly copiers for each unit to allow ease of faculty use. The college and university have also been the recipients of several grants containing technology components that have positively impacted the Delta region, including school settings.

Candidate Proficiencies Aligned with Professional and State Standards
All teacher education programs within the unit have adopted the standards of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) as the proficiencies which are represented by the conceptual framework and on which much of the assessment system is based. The INTASC standards are imbedded within the Student Teacher Assessment Instrument (STAI) which was developed collaboratively by the Mississippi Department of Education and the college and university teacher education programs across Mississippi.

Additionally, the proficiencies of CACREP, ACEI, ELCC, and other professional organizations are also representative of the conceptual framework and serve as a guide for assessment within the initial and advanced programs. The proficiencies of INTASC and the professional organizations are recognized by the Mississippi Department of Education as the state standards upon which educator preparation programs should be built. The chart below indicates which professional standards are aligned with the specific programs for educator preparation across the unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Professional Organization Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Education</td>
<td>National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biology Education</td>
<td>National Science Teachers Association (NSTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Leadership</td>
<td>Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Education</td>
<td>National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)</td>
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Additionally, the Mississippi Department of Education conducts annual reviews of each teacher education and leadership preparation program to ensure that other state standards are met. The unit demonstrates its commitment to rigor through the assessment system based on institutional, state, and national standards which are clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

### The Philosophy of the Education Unit

The College of Education is one of four academic units of a state regional university that began as a teachers’ college in 1925. The institution is well-known for its emphasis on providing exceptional classroom instruction, and this focus on faculty as excellent instructors stimulates discussion and reflection on educational programs and practices, especially in terms of current trends and issues related to preparing educators for the new millennium. Faculty members have been encouraged and aided in designing classes that challenge candidates intellectually and that contribute to the development of sound critical thinking skills. Additionally, faculty aid candidates in developing insight into the structure of their disciplines necessary for the formation of each candidate’s personal philosophy of education. As a result of discussions and reflection, the faculty and community partners of the Delta State University College of Education have defined a philosophy of teaching and learning that is interwoven throughout the conceptual framework. The beliefs informing the pedagogical and programmatic decisions of the unit reflect the professional and social commitment to the culture of the Mississippi Delta, an agricultural area with high rates of illiteracy and the accompanying socio-economic problems. Within this social context, the unit’s philosophy of education provides a definitive direction for work with educator preparation program candidates and the greater community of educational partners.

**Philosophical Agreements:**

**Candidates must be prepared for life-long learning.** Becoming an educator also means becoming a life-long learner. This process includes the development of a broad liberal arts foundation with a concentration of courses in the area of specialization which builds a foundation for understanding in the sciences, the arts, and the humanities. This liberal arts background contributes to the efficacy of candidates’ critical thinking abilities in an increasingly more technical and information-rich world. It also provides an appreciation of the arts and their essential role in adding beauty and harmony to the
culture, while challenging the status quo and stimulating change. To be successful over the course of time, candidates must study more intensely their chosen areas of specialization. Candidates must have a content foundation that strengthens the understanding of structure, concepts, issues, and trends within a chosen field.

The breadth of a liberal arts education and the depth of specialization enable candidates to see linkages among disciplines. Perceptions of the connections among diverse ideas contribute to creative and critical thinking. Insights derived from a liberal arts education contribute to improved communication skills because candidates develop common understandings that allow them to articulate their ideas more clearly.

**Candidates must be prepared for the technological world.** A broad liberal arts education and expertise in a discipline or the arts is not adequate for prolonged success. Prospective educators must be proficient in the practical application of technology in their areas of specialization and in pedagogical strategies. This means using technology for more than simplistic drills and tutorials. There is little doubt that to be considered literate, candidates, with facilitation from us, must be able to manipulate information and explore the world outside the classroom through the use of technology. They must be able to evaluate the relevancy and accuracy of information. Faculty must accept the challenge of integrating technology into the classroom through creative and innovative thinking, thus preparing candidates to make technology an enhancement to their intellectual pursuits and a part of their future classrooms.

**Candidates must be active learners.** Teaching must engage candidates and stimulate their intellectual curiosity and critical thinking skills. To be engaged is to be active in the learning process. Candidates must be constructing or co-constructing knowledge with their peers while they work on solving problems. Candidates must also be a facilitator in their students’ construction of knowledge. Education is not just the transmission of knowledge. At one time, learners depended solely on rote learning of discrete information and content transmitted exclusively through lecture or direct instruction. This mode of instruction may have prepared learners for the industrial world, but the shift to the information world demands a new model. The faculty and its educational partners, therefore, have embraced teaching strategies that demand the use of candidates’ critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities. The world is complex, and its problems have few right and wrong answers, and this dualistic mode of thinking assumes that absolutes exist. Through problem-solving and collaboration, candidates discern that there may be degrees of resolution to the problem or that they can move to agreeable positions on issues.

**Candidates must understand that learning is a developmental process.** Individuals do not simply keep adding knowledge; they move from concrete to more abstract forms of thinking. There is evidence that activity and emotional connections to problems stimulate development and enhance learning. Development begins initially in the social interaction of the individual which leads to cognitive and socio-emotional growth. This growth is enhanced as learners engage in collaboration and problem-solving. Candidates must, therefore, be educated in the processes associated with learning and development.
Candidates must see themselves as professionals with an ethical commitment to their students and communities. Candidates are encouraged to become caring educators who serve their respective communities and their profession with a high degree of ethical conduct. Candidates must strive to understand and participate in the social heritage of the communities in which they serve as educators. They must empower their students to explore their unique gifts and abilities. Participating in discussions of critical issues and current research encourages candidates to continue their professional growth and development. Candidates are encouraged and supported to participate in professional organizations resulting in enhanced social and professional identity and ethical behavior.

**Unit Goals**

The College of Education faculty, leadership, and educational partners develop and deliver dynamic and varied educator preparation programs that reflect the dual, yet shared, responsibilities of faculty and candidates. Since the scope of the vision includes input from all members of the Delta Educational Community, faculty, staff, and leadership serve as a conduit between the larger educational community and candidates who will ultimately serve that community. Expectations based on input from the entire educational community are communicated to candidates in three interdependent areas necessary for effective educator training: preparation, professionalism, and performance. The following goals for the educator preparation programs ensure that these purposes are accomplished.

**Preparation**

**Goal 1**
Candidates will be prepared to meet the ever-changing needs of a diverse student population. The curriculum for each program has been designed to: a) address standards-based knowledge and skills that ensure candidates are properly prepared in their chosen fields and are eligible for licensure, b) provide opportunities for development of effective communication skills and appropriate dispositions, and c) assist in the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

**Goal 2**
A wide variety of programs and services will be provided in order to improve the quality of life and raise the educational level of citizens of the Delta and the surrounding area.

**Goal 3**
Technological applications will be modeled in the classroom and candidates will be trained to integrate technology into their own educational environments. This integration of technology into the classroom is supported by the services provided in the Center for Teaching and Learning, housed in the College of Education.

**Goal 4**
Standards-based graduate programs will provide individuals with opportunities for advanced study and research in preparation for roles as leaders in a variety of educational settings.
Performance

Goal 5
Faculty will communicate to candidates the importance of effective classroom management, using a variety of strategies to promote cooperation and learning as well as the importance of organizing time, space, and activities.

Goal 6
A sequence of field experiences and internships will be provided to prepare candidates to effectively plan, implement, assess, and evaluate classroom-based instruction to ensure appropriate student learning in diverse educational settings.

Goal 7
A comprehensive system of candidate evaluation will be implemented and maintained utilizing both formative and summative measures throughout the candidates’ program of study.

Professionalism

Goal 8
Programs in the College of Education will be provided which cultivate intellectual curiosity, promote scholarship, and support community engagement through service learning experiences to create a new generation of productive citizens.

Goal 9
Highly qualified, diverse, and creative faculty who are committed to excellence in teaching, service, and scholarly activity will be consistently recruited.

Goal 10
A climate in which candidates and employees are valued and nurtured will be supported and maintained. The faculty, staff, candidates, and leaders work collectively to provide a positive, safe teaching and learning environment.

Goal 11
A student-centered environment that encourages holistic personal development will be promoted. Candidates will be encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities designed to foster diverse personal and professional development including those of a cultural, athletic, and/or community-oriented nature.

Goal 12
Recruitment of faculty and candidates will focus on identifying those individuals who can achieve success in supporting and enhancing a rigorous, expansive, and diverse educational experience within the P-12 community as well as in the university setting.
Conceptual Framework Knowledge Bases

American culture has evolved from its agrarian/mercantile roots in the Eighteenth Century, through the Industrial Revolution of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, to the technological boom of today. Each new cultural era created a corresponding set of needs in public education.

Today, students must know how to synthesize massive quantities of information, make decisions on pertinent issues, and work collaboratively in a positive manner. “The purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorize the ‘right’ answers and regurgitate someone else’s meaning” (Constructivism, n.d., Discussion section, para. 4). Higher order thinking skills are essential in meeting the needs of the student preparing for the new millennium. In order to be a success in the world today, students need confidence that is fostered by support and encouragement. They must be able to define information and provide a variety of solutions to a problem. They must also have the ability to think and problem solve without being forced into a standard plan. In the past, it was easy to teach in a recipe format; now, thinking “outside the box” is essential to success (Constructivism). The faculty, leadership, and community partners of the College of Education believe it is essential to provide a learning environment that is conducive to meeting these needs.

Theories and Theorists

Although the demands of each cultural era have driven the educational practice in that age, seminal thinkers from each time period continue to influence education today. Some of the theories and theorists that have been especially influential in philosophy and practice at Delta State University have been the Progressivism of John Dewey, the Cognitive Developmental Theory of Jean Piaget, and the Social Constructivism of Lev Vygotsky. Emerging research also continues to inform the practice of the unit. (e.g., Pratt, 2002).

In the early Twentieth Century, Dewey viewed public education as a laboratory of democracy. The school was an extension of civil society, with students operating as members of a community of learners. For Dewey, learning was a naturalistic interaction between the human organism and the social environment (Field, 2001).

While John Dewey was developing his ideas in the United States, Lev Vygotsky was developing his theories in Russia. However, his ideas were not known in the Western Hemisphere until the 1960’s. Vygotsky’s Theory of Social Constructivism focuses on the learning activity rather than the individual learner (Huang, 2002; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, n.d.; Zhu, 1998. For social constructivists, learning is a “process of social negotiation or collaborative sense making, mentoring, and joint knowledge construction” (Zhu, p. 234).

This theory “combines social environment and cognition. [Individuals] acquire ways of thinking and behaving that make up a culture by interacting with a more knowledgeable person” (Gallagher, n.d., Theory section, para. 2). This interaction leads to continuous changes in thoughts and behaviors (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). When beginning activities, learners depend on others with greater knowledge and experience; but as time
passes, they become more able to take responsibility for their own learning. This validates the use of collaboration in effective teaching (John-Steiner & Mahn).

More traditional theories emphasized learning as an outcome only, while Vygotsky believed that learning is a process and the process is actually the outcome (Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999). Therefore, the process of learning can be transferred to other situations and by perfecting the process one can become a life-long learner. In the world today, we realize the importance of life-long learning because information and technology become obsolete in a short time. If individuals cannot process information and adapt to new information, they will be ill equipped to be successful in the Twenty-first Century.

Later in the Twentieth Century, Jean Piaget influenced American education, especially in elementary education and in the sciences and math. Unlike Dewey and Vygotsky who emphasized the social nature of education, Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development emphasized the process through which individual children order their world.

The philosophical themes that emerge from a study of these three theorists and others, with particular emphasis on Vygotsky, serve as the foundation for philosophy and practice across the unit and are the foundation of the conceptual framework. These themes include (a) the school as a model for democracy, (b) learning as a process of social interaction, and (c) a rich experience base as a foundation for cognitive development.

Encouraging Effective Teaching
Current research in education has expanded the social constructivist viewpoint on learning to value differences in individual styles and practices that result in effective teaching. One model of interest suggests that there are five perspectives on effective teaching: transmission, developmental, apprenticeship, nurturing, and social reform (Pratt, 2002). Each of these perspectives can result in effective teaching and can be found throughout the programs in the College of Education.

In the State of Mississippi, middle and secondary education majors typically have a degree or an emphasis in the area of content in which they teach. As a result, the transmission perspective is generally utilized because it places major emphasis on content mastery. In order to do this, transmission teachers spend a great deal of time in preparation and organization of information. They are specific about the objectives for learning and how to attain those objectives. They use assessment as a means for determining the level of understanding of the content. Their passion about the content material often makes an impression on the learner (Pratt, 2002).

The developmental perspective perceives teaching as a more constructivist approach. This perspective is common in elementary, early childhood, and some special education classrooms. Developmental teachers understand how their students learn and utilize the learner’s own experiential base as a means for improving learning. Typically, developmental teachers value prior knowledge and challenge the learner by using effective questioning and meaningful examples. The use of these strategies helps the teacher to take the learner from previous ways of thinking to more complex and intricate
Developmental teachers generally have a large accumulation of techniques and examples to use to help learners build their own means of understanding (Pratt, 2002).

The apprentice perspective is found throughout the unit in courses including field experiences. This perspective emphasizes learning that occurs in authentic tasks practiced in real settings. Recognizing that it is difficult to transfer information learned only in a college classroom setting to work sites, the apprentice perspective emphasizes the transferring of information into a usable skill for practice settings. Teachers find ways to help the learner to acquire the identity of the profession by learning the language, values, and practices of a skilled professional. These instructors provide opportunities for learners to work on meaningful and relevant tasks. Scaffolding and the use of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development are often utilized in this approach to teaching (Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999; Pratt, 2002).

The teacher practicing the nurturing perspective has high expectations of learners, but believes that the learners’ confidence and self-esteem affect their success. This teacher takes extra time to understand why learners have certain problems with success and attempts to relieve the fear of failure that many have acquired. The nurturing teacher searches for a balance between challenging learners and meeting their emotional needs. These teachers provide a great deal of encouragement and support, as well as clear expectations and reasonable goals for each learner. Assessment may address individual progress rather than just academic success (Pratt, 2002).

Finally, the social reform perspective generally suggests the view that includes teachers who are passionate, not only about the content, but about the learner’s ability to actually make a difference in the world. They work hard to promote the dignity of their learners and place great value on diversity within the classroom environment. These teachers have high ideals that they want to impart to their learners and are quite fervent in doing so. They encourage students to look, not only at content, but also at the particular setting in which facts occur. They believe that the circumstances of a situation help the learner better appreciate what is being learned. These teachers often cause learners to question what they have previously taken for granted and help them to look at life more critically (Pratt, 2002).

The faculty, leadership, and community partners of the unit continue to seek ways to support these themes of (a) the school as a model for democracy, (b) learning as a process of social interaction, and (c) a rich experience base as a foundation for cognitive development. It is believed that utilizing multiple perspectives of teaching allows candidates to appreciate more fully the diverse learning experiences encountered on the campus of Delta State University. The importance of helping each candidate take the experiences they bring with them to find more effective ways of learning and communicating is recognized fully by the unit. The faculty, leadership, and community partners of the College of Education have demonstrated a commitment to provide each of the unit’s candidates with a comprehensive, balanced, and effective education in an environment in which learning is encouraged and high expectations are evident.
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An Introduction to Information Literacy 
and its Place in the Higher Education Curriculum

David M. Salinero and Joi J. Phillips
Delta State University

Abstract

This article examines the definition and value of information literacy and how it can be incorporated into the college curriculum. With today’s society dealing with an overload of information, colleges and universities have rallied around information literacy initiatives focusing on the student’s facility to properly define an information need, locate that information, and then contextualize it appropriately. These skills go beyond the completion of a single assignment or course and provide students with the ability to become lifelong learners and to succeed in the information driven careers that lie ahead.

Most would agree that literacy, at a very basic level, involves the ability to read and write. However, society finds itself battling a preponderance of information, a relentless growth of the Internet, and a surging presence of knowledge societies and knowledge-based economies. For their part, educational institutions have been developing programs that focus on information literacy – a recognition of the need to find new ways to process this influx of information, to encourage good learning habits, and to prepare individuals for what lies ahead in the working world. For many of today’s students, “Information is power” becomes a practical reality rather than a simple cliché.

Information literacy, while possibly conjuring up nebulous connotations, can be summarized in three distinct points: defining or recognizing the information need, performing directed searches for that information, and being able to place the information in context with other knowledge and use it effectively. Since the 1990s, information literacy has become the poster child for librarianship, “a major focus and purpose” (Marcum, 2002, p. 1) of the profession. Many libraries, including Delta State University’s Roberts-LaForge Library, have incorporated information literacy into their library instruction programs. While true that librarians have stressed the need, and often led the charge, information literacy falls far from the exclusive domain of libraries and librarians.

Johnston and Webber (2003) illustrate that while library skills use specific knowledge and unique tools, information literacy involves a higher set of abilities that combine both the use of library skills and cognitive faculties. In other words, the process
involves more than just pointing and clicking and finding the full-text of an article; it is designed to transcend any particular discipline and to guide students in becoming lifelong learners. Indeed, a knowledge-based economy “will require that workers possess information literacy skills … skills necessary for the workplace of the future” (Plotnick, 1999, p. 3). Abilock (2004) articulates it best:

> Our task is to teach our students the rigorous, analytical, sweaty work of closely examining an argument, questioning our thinking patterns, [and] ferreting out inconsistencies—fundamentals of critical thinking. Rather than teach the skill, if we teach to transfer that skill—in using a library, recognizing bias, or analyzing an argument—from one setting or task to another, students recognize that information literacy is not a school task but a lifetime habit of mind—of evaluating and using information for personal, social, or global purposes. (p. 10)

In 2000, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) created a list of standards, performance indicators, and outcomes to assist librarians and educators in the assessment process (Information Literacy Competency, 2000). ACRL and the library community’s hope centered on raising an awareness of the need, but also highlighting a subtle gap in higher education’s curriculum.

Responding to the call, colleges and universities have found many successful ways to incorporate these important skills into the curriculum. Adding for-credit courses to existing programs of study is probably the most direct and obvious way of dealing with the inadequacy. For-credit information literacy courses are typically taught by librarians and the courses usually range anywhere from one to three hours of credit depending on the institution’s commitment to the concept. These classes, reaching out to freshmen and graduate students alike, can be taught in traditional or online settings, or a combination of the two. Normally, freshmen and transfer students are targeted for these types of courses because studies have shown that mastering information literacy improves the rate of retention (Rushing and Poole, 2002). Examples of some of the existing for-credit courses are *Introduction to Information Literacy*, a one-credit course at Delta State University, *Information Literacy 101*, a two-credit course at York College of Pennsylvania and *InfoGlut: Deal with It*, a three-credit course at Arizona State University East. When creating a for-credit course of this nature, the biggest hurdle that librarians or faculty must leap is institutional bureaucracy. Sometimes, getting a new course added, or better
yet, getting a new course added as a general education requirement, becomes the hardest part of the entire process. Not only do faculty members jockey for position and respectability for their new courses, but depending on the academic climate, many administrators and faculty may not immediately see the need for a “library” course.

Pre-existing courses that have included information literacy components are often research and writing intensive. In addition to the regular content of a course, librarians collaborate with faculty in various disciplines to teach these skills. At Columbia College in South Carolina, the reference staff partnered with several departmental faculty members in English, History, and even Dance to develop quality research methods and search strategies. This partnership allowed students to establish links among the library, faculty, coursework, and learning (Tuttle, Tuten, and Graham, 2005). In another example, Hearn (2005), a librarian from Daniel Webster College in New Hampshire, collaborated with a Humanities faculty member to teach English 102, an undergraduate writing and research course. The librarian taught eight of fourteen classes covering types of sources, locating information using print indexes and databases, reading citations, and evaluating sources. To measure the effectiveness of adding the library component, students were given pre and posttests designed jointly by the faculty member and librarian. The pretest consisted of five questions in which the students had fifteen minutes to complete as much of the test as possible using what research skills they already possessed. The tests were not graded as the purpose was primarily to ascertain the students’ research habits. Subsequently the instructors expected the posttest to measure any development of skills learned throughout the course’s duration. While both tests were intended to monitor research behavior, the posttest showed that students used better sources and answered more questions by the end of the semester. Moreover, through this interdisciplinary collaboration, students began to understand the need for locating quality information and how to use it effectively. It is interesting to note that D’Angelo and Maid (2004) reported that successful library-faculty collaborations were often based on projects that were funded by outside sources and led by dynamic faculty members (librarians included) who already had tenure, thus giving the projects more respectability and weight.

Another way to insert information literacy into required courses is through course-integrated instruction. This type of instruction is based on the premise of teaching
a skill at the point of need or when there is an assignment. Many faculty argue that the best time for students to learn something is when they need it. For example, when students are required to write research papers for class, they are shown appropriate ways to search for and locate information and, if time permits, how to evaluate that information. Although one session is better than none, this arrangement often lacks effectiveness because students have so little exposure and often fail to see the big picture that information literacy promises.

The most creative and enjoyable ways of including information literacy skills in the curriculum are through freshmen seminars or first year programs whose goal it is to orient the student to the university and to build a positive relationship that will foster the student’s education, encourage academic excellence, and increase retention rates. For these types of courses, librarians have offered games such as murder mysteries or scavenger hunts so students could have fun while learning valuable skills. Marcus and Beck (2003) showed that self-guided treasure hunts proved more helpful than traditional library orientation tours for several reasons: students worked at their own pace, engaged in active learning, learned more through self-motivation, and responded positively to verbal and written praise when they completed assignments.

Although there is not an exact way or perfect prescription for incorporating information literacy into the curriculum, there are certainly many opportunities to explore. In addition to the methods already mentioned, Rockman (2004) further states that information literacy could be included in teacher education programs, residential learning communities, faculty development centers, writing across the curriculum initiatives, as well as online and distance education programs.

While some argue that information literacy, the concept, stresses format and methodology over gaining true knowledge (Isaacson, 2003) and looks at information as a static “thing,” rather than “an ongoing conversation about what counts as knowledge,” (Pawley, 2003, p. 448) the tenets and goals of information literacy stand firm. Information literacy provides an excellent way to combine higher education’s hopes of learning and knowledge with students’ future career goals and opportunities. Educators should take notice of the growing need to find different and more innovative ways to incorporate information-processing tools in the coursework. While the authors look at the
collaborative methods as being the most effective, the possibilities remain numerous and the outcomes worth the effort.

References


The Role of the Rural School Counselor in Preparing High School Students for College

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Abstract

The rural school counselor has a unique role in preparing high school students for postsecondary educational opportunities. Due to lower expectations of rural high school students, influenced by significant adults in their lives including parents and the larger school community, these students have lower aspirations related to college. The literature supports that the rural school counselor can serve as an important voice in advocating for the student and, as such, may be the only voice advocating for rural high school students’ entry into postsecondary education.

Counselors working in school settings provide services that address the academic, personal, and career needs of students. Historically, one role of the school counselor has been to influence student aspirations for postsecondary education. When school counselors, parents, teachers and the larger school community consistently communicate messages of high expectations and encouragement, students are influenced towards college (Breen, 1989; Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989). A challenge specific to the school counselor in a rural setting is that students in rural communities tend to have lower aspirations for postsecondary education than students living in urban areas (Cobb et al., 1989).

Students in rural schools, which account for over one-half of the school districts in the United States, have been called the “invisible minority” in terms of resources and recruitment for higher education (Rubisch, 1995). As a result, school counselors may be the only postsecondary educational advocates accessible to some students (Cobb et al., 1989). Students in a rural school face a number of obstacles related to higher education such as lower expectations. A responsibility of the rural school counselor is to help students move beyond these obstacles that may be limiting their vision for the future and to begin inspiring students at an early age to develop high aspirations and goals for career options that would involve postsecondary education (Breen, 1989).
Student Aspirations

Resources, parental messages, and expectations of students by the school community affect student aspirations related to postsecondary education. Rural youth consistently report lower expectations and aspirations for postsecondary achievement than their urban counterparts (Cobb et al., 1989). One study indicates that 22.8% of rural students, compared to 14.1% of urban students, expect high school graduation to be their highest academic achievement. In addition, 37.3% of rural students, compared to 24.1% of urban students, are satisfied to only achieve high school graduation (Cobb et al., 1989). In other words, rural students are less likely to view postsecondary education as necessary or expected; their aspirations are lower than those of students in an urban setting. We know that the aspirations of high school students are “influenced considerably by the communicated expectations of the significant people” (Cobb et al., 1989, p12) with whom the student interacts. Resultantly, this would indicate that significant adults in the lives of the rural students consistently convey a message of low expectations when compared to the message conveyed to urban youth by significant adults (Cobb et al., 1989).

School counselors generally agree that the socioeconomic mobility a college degree could provide is important, but is really a secondary benefit to influencing students in this way (Pratt & Skaggs, 1989). The primary benefit of influencing students in this fashion would be realized within the evolving hope and aspiring dreams of students as they dared to envision, for themselves, a future with great purpose and possibility. In rural settings, this vision is undermined by the fact that fewer of these students apply for postsecondary education (Hines, 2002). Ironically, although fewer apply, those that do enter college historically perform just as well as students from urban settings once they are in the postsecondary environment (Hines, 2002). An understanding of the reality that students from rural settings are less likely to apply to postsecondary education, yet just as likely to succeed, provides school counselors with an area for advocacy. As advocates for their students, rural school counselors have both the opportunity and responsibility to help students see their potential for postsecondary success and provide messages of high expectations.

Rural school counselors are in a remarkable position. In fact, Breen (1989) indicated that rural school counselors have more influence and potential to positively
impact the lives of students and enhance their future aspirations than urban school counselors. This is a result of rural school counselors having “the opportunity to develop strong supportive relationships with students because of generally smaller numbers of students and greater parent and community involvement” (Breen, 1989, p. 37). With rural parents and community members often not expecting students to aspire past a high school education rural school counselors may find themselves working to adapt the school and community vision of what constitutes success for students (Hines, 2002; Cobb et al., 1989)). In challenging the expectations of the school community and helping students aspire for greater academic achievement, the school counselor has the ability to help students move beyond subconscious hindrances that may limit the student’s vision and goals for the future (Breen, 1989).

Role of the Counselor

As previously indicated, the school counselor in a rural setting has a unique opportunity to work with students, teachers, and parents to communicate a positive, consistent message to promote higher aspirations among rural youth (Breen, 1989; Quaglia, 1989). A school counselor can be the catalyst for transforming an existing negative school atmosphere, which may foster low student ambition, into a dynamic setting that promotes growth and high aspirations (Quaglia, 1989). By implementing self-awareness exercises (Grimm, 1997; Marthers, 1997), initiating group discussions (Goodnough & Ripley, 1997), and bringing in former students to advocate for postsecondary education (McCormick, 1995), school counselors can consistently communicate a message of high expectation to students. Additionally, rural school counselors benefit their students by engaging parents in the career planning process and providing opportunities for college field trips (Rubisch, 1995). Through early intervention with high school freshmen and sophomores, some students who would not have considered going to college may begin to see themselves as candidates for postsecondary education (Grimm, 1997). Early intervention provides the counselor with more time and opportunity to assist and encourage students in areas where the parents may be ill equipped to help (Grimm, 1997).

High school students whose parents have never attended college have a unique set of needs (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). These students cannot benefit from their parents college experiences, and therefore may require special assistance from the
counselor (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Potential problems with this group can be cognitive in nature and deal with the students underestimating their own ability to be successful in college (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). The counselor’s role is to assist the student not only in overcoming any actual barriers to college such as completing applications and assisting with financial aid, but also assist the student in overcoming perceptions or emotional barriers that may exist as a result of family history or environmental influences (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004).

Conclusion

It has become one of the primary responsibilities of a counselor to encourage and motivate students, as well as, providing resources and educating parents and students alike on the benefits and career options available when students pursue postsecondary education (Breen, 1989; Cobb et al., 1989). In fact, school counselors may be the only postsecondary educational advocates accessible to some students in rural and urban schools (Cobb et al., 1989). To best serve their students, rural school counselors are challenged to review current methods and mindsets and strive toward fostering dynamic school settings where growth and high aspirations are promoted (Grimm, 1997; Goodnough & Ripley, 1997; Martthers, 1997; McCormick, 1995). There is a significant need among rural schools and communities for education, awareness, and change in the way adults significant in the lives of students consistently communicate expectations related to students (Cobb et al., 1989). Through involvement with students, parents, school administration, and community leaders, school counselors can help to transform the culture of a rural school and community, and they can positively impact the future of students in rural school environments.

References


Serving the Needs of Mississippi Delta Middle Grade Reading Teachers: A Review of Mississippi Valley State University’s NCLB 2005 Summer Reading Institute

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Pearl Strickland Pennington
Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning

Abstract

This report describes the major features and outcomes of the MVSU NCLB 2005 Summer Reading Program. In alignment with the NCLB Act (2001) that every child should be taught by a highly qualified teacher in core academic areas such as reading, Mississippi Valley State University provided a summer reading program through a series of professional development activities designed to improve Delta reading teachers’ effectiveness in teaching reading. The goal of the program was to increase Mississippi Delta students’ reading achievement.

It is widely recognized among educators and researchers that teacher quality is a key component of students’ achievement. A teacher’s content knowledge, pedagogy, and cognitive ability are closely correlated with effectiveness of classroom teaching and increase in student achievement (C. Heimel, 2003; A. W. Heilman, Blair, & Rupley, 2002; Langer, 2000, 2004; Reutzel & Cooter, 2003). As mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2001, every child should be taught by a highly qualified teacher in core academic areas such as reading. Because of its importance to academic success in all areas, reading has become a widely discussed issue in research and schools.

The Mississippi Delta, an 18-county region in the northwestern part of the state of Mississippi, ranks among the poorest regions in the nation. Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU) is located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, where 25 percent of the black population of the state lives (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Five school districts around MVSU (Greenwood Public School District, Leflore County School District, Indianola School District, Sunflower School County District, and Shaw School District) are predominantly comprised of African American students (87.2%) (Mississippi Assessment and Accountability Reporting System, 2006). All of these five school districts receive Title I funds. The Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) (2005) shows that in the school year of 2004-2005, only 35.5% of 7th grade reading scores in these districts
were at or above proficient level, while statewide the score in reading for the school year of 2004-2005 was 62.9%. Educators in the Mississippi Delta area are facing a critical need and challenge to improve students’ reading performance.

Program Goals and Objectives

The MVSU NCLB 2005 Summer Reading Institute was designed to ensure the implementation of the mandates of the NCLB Act of 2001 to raise student achievement in the core academic subject area of reading. The program attempted to accomplish its goal by providing teachers from selected Mississippi Delta school districts with the training to improve their skills and quality of reading instruction. Particular needs of the students who are historically under-served in the Mississippi Delta were addressed. Therefore, the project met a critical need to improve the quality of instruction so that no child is left behind, unable to read and learn effectively.

The goal of the program was to improve teacher quality by providing a series of professional development activities using the established knowledge bases and best practices of the Mississippi Language Arts Frameworks, the Mississippi Reading Reform Model, and State and International Reading Standards including technology standards. These activities were expected to enhance teachers’ academic instructional skills to teach reading and thus improve students’ reading performance as measured by the Mississippi Curriculum Test.

Project Participants and Activities

The MVSU NCLB 2005 Summer Reading Institute, a program to improve teacher quality, was funded by the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) through the United States Department of Education (USDE) grant: NCLB Improving Teacher Quality Title II-part A. It was a four-week intensive professional development summer program that ran from July 1 through July 29, 2005. Thirty-three elementary and middle school reading teachers, with teaching experience ranging from 2 years to 30 years, were chosen from the five school districts around MVSU.

One hundred percent of the participants were female; ninety seven percent of participants were African American; three percent of the participants were from other ethnic groups. The sample of 7th grade Mississippi Curriculum Reading Test (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005) was used as a pre/posttest to measure the teachers’ content knowledge. By using the Mississippi Curriculum Reading Test, we intended to
assess how familiar our participants were with context clues, word structures, vocabulary, workplace data, and comprehension which are major components of the test. Other instruments such as reading and technology surveys and program evaluation were also administered before, during, and after the program. Two follow-up sessions were conducted, with one in the 2005 fall semester and the other in the 2006 spring semester.

Major Class Activities
July 1-July 29, 2005

| July 1, Orientation | 1. Welcome message  
|                     | 2. Discussion of class schedule  
|                     | 3. NCLB Act 2001  
|                     | 4. MS Reading Reform Model—Every Child a Reader  
|                     | 5. Pretest  |

| July 5-8, Theme: Using theory to guide practice | 1. Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development  
|                                                | 2. Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development  
|                                                | 3. Creating a literacy-rich, well-organized, well-managed classroom environment in which literacy development is supported and motivated  
|                                                | 4. Learning styles and materials  
|                                                | 5. Assessment instruments  |

| July 11-15: Theme: Content knowledge | 1. Phonemic awareness  
|                                     | • Oral language development  
|                                     | • Phonemic awareness-phoneme manipulation  
|                                     | • Blending  
|                                     | • Segmentation  
| 2. Phonics                          | • Graphophonemic relationships  
|                                     | • Letter-sound associations  
|                                     | • Letter-sound correspondences  
|                                     | • Sound-symbol correspondences  
|                                     | • Sound-spellings  
| 3. Vocabulary                       | • Morphology  
|                                     | • Multiple meaning of words  
|                                     | • Receptive vocabulary  
|                                     | • Expressive vocabulary  
| 4. Fluency                          | • Accuracy  
|                                     | • Rate  
|                                     | • Prosody  
|                                     | • Automaticity  
| 5. Text comprehension              | • Comprehension process and metacognition  
|                                     | • Narrative text  |
### Areas of reading included theory, content knowledge, effective teaching strategies, and assessment. Program instructors used modeling and scaffolding to introduce one area per week. Participants developed individual lesson plans and thematic units for major activities. They practiced aligning their lesson plans and thematic units with national and state standards such as the International Reading Association (IRA), the
Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), the Mississippi Language Arts Framework/Reading Instructional Intervention Supplement, and Mississippi Reading Reform Model. Class activities centered on attaining NCLB 2005 Summer Reading Institute goals and objectives.

Participants were also encouraged to bring dilemmas encountered in their classrooms and then were offered suggestions and help to address those issues. Stipends, instructional materials and manipulative tools for their classroom use and opportunities for attending state, regional, or national conferences as presenters were provided through the grant.

Program Evaluation

Both internal and external measures were used to evaluate the project’s outcomes. Information utilized by the external evaluator and the internal assessment faculty member was obtained from standardized tests, surveys, questionnaires, documentation, observations, and field interviews. The following is a brief summary of the analysis.

A paired sample t-test was performed to test if the pre- and post- test mean differences were significant. As shown in Table 1 below, the t-test indicated that a significant statistical difference was found to exist ($p<.01$) between the means of the pre- and posttests. Further, the descriptive statistics show that the posttest mean was higher than the pretest mean. Also, a considerable reduction in the posttest standard deviation was noted. Consequently, these statistics strongly suggest that the desired learning took place as measured by the 7th grade Mississippi Curriculum Reading Test.

Table 1 Paired sample $t$-test for the NCLB 2005 Summer Reading Institute pre/posttests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Correlations</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair Pretest &amp; Posttest</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paired Samples Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>78.65</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.572</td>
<td>2.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>89.62</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.790</td>
<td>1.920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paired Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Std/error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>2-tailed sig.</th>
<th>95% Conf. Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-10.96</td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>-5.93</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-14.77 -7.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<=0.05

In the reading and technology survey and program evaluation, the majority of the participants expressed that they learned most by demonstrating and modeling strategies in the areas of reading, technology, and assessment skills. Hands-on practice was most helpful for this group of participants. They also showed interest in guest speakers on school management and school discipline issues. Instructional materials and manipulative tools proved to be beneficial in their own classrooms such as but not limited to teacher’s guide, text and strategy books, children’s literature, and multimedia.

An evaluation portfolio was developed throughout the project containing the collected data and ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of the project activities. These data include baseline data collected at the beginning of each major activity through pretest and reading and technology survey, observable data that demonstrates project effectiveness, participants’ judgments and feedback through the survey and interaction with the program managers on a daily basis, and outcome indicators through posttest and program evaluation. Thus, this ongoing evaluation process monitored the program, verified the service, and satisfied the needs of the teachers to assure the program quality was maintained and improved.

Dissemination of Results

A report of the results was compiled and submitted to the grantor and stakeholders. Participants’ lesson plans and thematic units were published to a website developed as a resource for teachers to use: www.mvsu.edu/nclb. A research group was formed to help participants develop and maintain an interest in research of the program.
Also, a research proposal was conducted and the proposal was accepted and presented at the fourth annual Hawaiian International Conference on Education.

Discussion

The potential impact of the program is promising, with expectations of improved participants’ outcomes in the area of teaching reading and a statistically significant increase in reading scores in these school districts in the coming year. If teachers make reading interesting and meaningful, then students will be motivated to read. We have to invest ourselves to carry out our responsibilities to teach effectively. We truly believe that every child is a potential successful reader. Quality of teaching can facilitate student reading achievement and eliminate the gap between the Mississippi Delta students and Mississippi students overall.

Classroom teachers are overwhelmed by social demands that they provide high-quality, scientific research-based and effective reading instruction. Teachers must be prepared to respond to such a social demand by being knowledgeable about policies and programs that affect results of teaching, keeping up with current research, improving their skills of teaching and classroom management, and use of assessment results and technology to improve instruction. Especially in this high-need area, reading teachers need to fully understand Mississippi Delta students’ needs and how to be more effective in the classroom. This project responded to the NCLB Act by exposing teachers to high-quality professional development and providing resources in order to improve teachers’ quality. The ultimate goal is to improve Mississippi Delta students’ reading proficiency, to help Delta students become not only readers, but good readers.

References


A Comparison of In-Class and Online Student Evaluations

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Abstract

A comparative analysis of results from simultaneous in-class and online student evaluations taught in a social science department at a large public university strongly suggests that the online evaluations are neither valid nor reliable because of nonrandom error resulting from very high levels of non-response. As a result of this study, the Department decided not to use online evaluations in annual reviews of its faculty until a subsequent and more detailed analysis is found to contradict this finding or average response rates for online evaluations (about 26 %) achieve those for in-class evaluations (about 72 %).

In the fall of 2003, a large public university moved all of its student evaluations to an online system and dropped the use of (scanned) in-class evaluations, a system that had been in place for many years. Several departments expressed concern about low response rates when this move was announced because low response rates typically lead to non-random error (Kalton, 1983; Dillman, 2000).

Because of concerns about low response rates and the resulting effect they would have on validity and reliability, one of the concerned departments, at its own expense, conducted in-class evaluations of nine courses in Fall 2003. Five of the nine courses were lower division, three were upper division and one was a graduate course (See Table 1). Enrollments in these nine courses ranged from 14 to 70, with an average of 40 and a standard deviation of 21.

Methods

The in-class instrument matches in the same order and question-for-question, the eleven items found in the online instrument. The in-class instruments were distributed and picked up in class during the last week of classes by a staff member in the absence of the instructor. The evaluations were returned to the department chair, who tabulated the results for item #11 in Spring 2004.

The data for the online evaluations done in Fall 2003 for these same nine courses were taken directly from the summaries available on the University’s website. This was done around the same time that results for item # 11 from the in-class evaluations were tabulated. It was immediately apparent that the response rates for the
online evaluations were far below those of the equivalent in-class evaluations. Table 1 provides a comparison of them by course type, along with an item-by-item comparison.

Table 1.

Response Rates for Item #11 by Response Category and Course Type (In-Class and Online)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Type/ Evaluation &amp; Results</th>
<th>Response Category</th>
<th>Number/ Percent Responding*</th>
<th>Number Enrolled</th>
<th>Percent Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOWER DIVISION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N IN-CLASS</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>269</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of IN-CLASS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N ONLINE</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>269</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ONLINE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| UPPER DIVISION & GRADUATE        |                  |                             |                |                   |
| N IN-CLASS                       | A                | 19                          | 74             | 79.6              |
|                                  | B                | 24                          | 93             |                   |
|                                  | C                | 20                          |                |                   |
|                                  | D                | 6                           |                |                   |
|                                  | E                | 5                           |                |                   |
| % of IN-CLASS                    |                  |                             |                |                   |
| N ONLINE                         | A                | 25.0                        | 100.0          |                   |
|                                  | B                | 28.6                        |                |                   |
|                                  | C                | 35.7                        |                |                   |
|                                  | D                | 7.1                         |                |                   |
|                                  | E                | 3.6                         |                |                   |
| % of ONLINE                       |                  |                             |                |                   |
|                                  | A                | 33.3                        | 100.0          |                   |
|                                  | B                | 33.4                        |                |                   |
|                                  | C                | 22.2                        |                |                   |
|                                  | D                | 11.1                        |                |                   |
|                                  | E                | 0.0                         |                |                   |

* percents by category may not sum exactly to 100 due to rounding error

In addition to the obvious difference in response rates, the data in Table 1 suggest that the differences result in non-response error (bias). For example, in the lower division courses, the proportion giving an overall rating of “superior” is less in the online evaluations than in the in-class evaluations. For the upper division courses, the proportion giving an overall rating of “superior” is higher in the online evaluations than in the in-class evaluations. The issue of non-response error is examined in more detail in the following section.

One important item is revealed by Table 1, namely a high level of “intra-evaluator reliability.” Not once does the number of online responses exceed the number of in-class responses. This suggests that when they did respond online, students gave the
same responses as they did in class. This indicates that findings are not likely to be contaminated by intra-evaluator reliability problems.

There are issues with any student evaluations of instructors (Abrami, 1989; Abrami d’Apollonia & Cohen, 1990; Benson & Lewis, 1994; d’Apollonia & Abrami, 1997, Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997a, 1997b; Long & Lake, 1996; Trout, 1997a, 1997b). However, whatever the problems with student evaluations in general, the in-class evaluations are here viewed as the “gold standard” because of their longer history of use and their substantially higher response rates.

Analysis

The philosophy underlying this analysis is that the online evaluations should consistently have the same proportional distributions as the in-class ones to be valid and reliable. With this as the analytic framework, the data in Table 1 suggest two hypotheses that can be used to analyze non-response error. The first and more general is that the distributions of responses for in-class and online evaluations are different (not valid) but not consistently so (not reliable), by category (A = “superior,” B = “excellent,” C = “good,” D = “marginal,” and E = “poor”) The second is more specific, namely that there is differential response by response category (A, B, C, D, E) for those students doing online evaluations compared to those done in-class.

To examine the first hypothesis, the Index of Dissimilarity (ID) is used (McKibben & Faust, 2004: 118). This index has a long history of use in evaluating the equivalence of two distributions (Duncan & Duncan, 1955; Massey & Denton, 1998; Swanson, 1981). It measures the percentage of one set of responses that would need to be reallocated in order to match the distribution of another set of responses to the same items. In this case, we will measure the percentage of online responses that need to be reallocated to match the in-class distribution of responses for the same course. The Index is bounded by zero and 50. That is, no less than zero would need to be reallocated and no more than 50 percent would need to be reallocated. ID is defined as:
\[ ID = 100 \times \{0.5 \times \left[ \sum \left| i_i - o_i \right| \right] \} \]

where

- \( ID \) = the Index of Dissimilarity
- \( i_i \) = the proportion of in-class responses for response category \( i \)
- \( o_i \) = the proportion of online responses for response category \( i \)

and

\[ \left| i_i - o_i \right| i = \text{the absolute difference between } i_i \text{ and } o_i \]

Table 2 provides the mean ID and standard deviation by type of course.

**Table 2.**

**Index of Dissimilarity Scores by Course Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Type</th>
<th>Summary Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOWER DIVISION</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPPER DIVISION</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADUATE</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL COURSES</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information in Table 2 shows that the in-class and online distributions are very different across course types. On average for all nine courses, ID has a value of 18.3, which means that on average 18.3 percent of the online distributions would need to be re-allocated to match the in-class distributions. This is a high level of difference. Recall that the maximum ID score is 50.0. An average of 18.3 indicates that across all nine courses the average difference is about 37 percent of the maximum (36.6 = (18.3/50)*100).

To examine the second, more specific, hypothesis that there is differential response by response category, two methods are employed. The first is bivariate regression and the second is a measure termed here as “Online Non-response Bias” (ONB).

Bivariate regression analysis is an appropriate method to examine the second hypothesis because it can show if there is or is not a linear (or approximately linear) relationship between the response category and the difference between the online and in-class responses. To use regression, the original five response categories of A, B, C, D, and E, are recoded using ordinal values as (i.e., A Superior = 5, B Excellent = 4, C Good = 3, D Marginal =2, & E Poor = 1).
The regression model is set up as 45 observations (five response categories by nine courses) with the recoded response category as the independent variable (Resp) and the difference between the number of in-class and online responses as the dependent variable (Diff = in-class – online). SPSS was used to generate the model, which is shown in Exhibit 2, along with descriptive statistics for the two variables and the model’s characteristics.²

Exhibit 2.
The Regression Model: Diff = a+ b*(Resp)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diff</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\text{Diff} = -1.43 + 1.79(\text{Resp})
\]

\[r^2 = .23\]

s.e.e. = 4.76

Results

As indicated by the standard deviation of 13.2 shown in Table 2, there is a substantial degree of variation in the ID scores across the nine courses. That is, on average, the individual courses vary by about 13 percent from the mean of 18.3. These findings provide support for the first hypothesis.

Taken altogether, the substantial overall mean ID indicates that the online evaluations are not valid because of the magnitude of the disparity between them and the in-class evaluations for these same classes. Moreover, the substantial overall standard deviation indicates that the online evaluations are not reliable because of the high level of variation in the ID scores, which represent an inconsistent relationship between them and the in-class evaluations.

With a very highly statistically significant \(p=.001\) coefficient of 1.79, the regression model explains about 23 percent of the variation in “Diff.” Importantly, the coefficient of 1.79 shows that, on average, for each unit increase in score, (E=1, D=2, C=3, B=4, and A=5), the difference in between online and in-class responses increases by
1.79. So, for a poor score (E=1), on average the difference between the number of responses online and the number in-class is virtually zero (-1.43 + 1.79*1 = .36).

However, for a superior score (A=5), the difference between the number of responses in-class and the number online is about eight (-1.43 + 1.79*5 = 8). This model strongly suggests that there is a tendency for students who give low marks to an instructor in-class to also provide these same low marks online while at the same time those students who give an instructor high marks in-class go online less frequently to give these same high marks. This provides support for hypothesis 2, namely that there is differential response by response category (A, B, C, D, and E) for those students doing in-class evaluations and those doing them online. The model also shows the nature of this differential response: students not pleased with an instructor tend to register their results online at a higher rate than those who are pleased. This suggests that instructors tend to be penalized overall by the online system.

The second method of analyzing hypothesis 2 also uses the recoded response categories (A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, and E=1). However, in order to analyze this by each individual course, regression is not appropriate since there would be only 5 observations per course. Instead, a measure termed “Online Non-response Bias” (ONB) is computed for each course.

ONB is calculated by first dividing the sum of the in-class scores by the maximum possible in-class score total (Ni*5) and dividing the sum of the online scores by the maximum online score total possible (No*5), then subtracting the online proportion from the in-class proportion, and expressing this difference as a percent:

\[
\text{ONB} = 100 \times \{ \frac{\sum_{i} i_i}{(N_i*5)} \} - \{ \frac{\sum_{o} o_i}{(N_o*5)} \}
\]

where, for a given course,

\[
\text{ONB} = \text{Online Non-response Bias}
\]

\[
i_i = \text{the proportion of in-class responses for response category i}
\]

\[
o_i = \text{the proportion of online responses for response category i}
\]

\[
N_i = \text{the number of respondents in-class}
\]

and

\[
N_o = \text{the number of respondents online}
\]
As an example of interpretation, ONB score of -11.0, means that the online score is 11 percent lower than the in-class score; an ONB of 9.00 means that the online score is 9 percent higher than the in-class score. Table 3 shows ONB means and standard deviations by type of course.

Table 3.

Online Non-Response Bias (ONB) by Course and Instructor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Summary Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Dev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOWER DIVISION</td>
<td>-4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPPER DIVISION</td>
<td>6.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRADUATE</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL COURSES</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that teaching lower division courses results in an overall average penalty while teaching upper division courses yields an overall average reward from online evaluations. Interestingly, these differences virtually wash out when looking at all courses combined: The average ONB is virtually zero (-0.50). However, the standard deviation tells the story – it is 6.65. That is, there is a great deal of variation around this mean. The single graduate course had an ONB score of zero.

Discussion

With only nine courses, one must take care not to over-analyze the data and read more into the results than can be supported by the data. However, the overall results support the two hypotheses and are generally consistent with expectations about the online evaluations. First, it was already known that response rates online are far below those of in-class evaluations. Second, it was no surprise that online non-response error was found. Third, it was no huge surprise that faculty tend to penalized by the low online response rates. Fourth, it was surprising that instructors teaching lower division courses (perhaps more generally, sections with large enrollments) tend to be penalized by low online response rates while those teaching upper division and graduate courses are not. These results are clearly manifestations of nonrandom error, the magnitude of which indicates that the validity and reliability problems of the online evaluations are such that they should not be used.

Whether or not these results are applicable beyond this case study is an open question. Ultimately this question could be answered only by a larger study, one that
collects a large and representative sample of all courses taught at a given university. The results reported here represent a case study and, as such, suggest that the findings in regard to the hypotheses are valid. However, studies elsewhere are needed to provide a more conclusive confirmation.

Until either a more detailed analysis was done that contradicts the findings here or average response rates for online evaluations (about 26%) achieve those for in-class evaluations (about 72%), the Department decided not use the online evaluations in its annual review of faculty of any rank. For assistant and associate professors, the Department decided to use in-class evaluations such that untenured faculty will have in-class evaluations for all courses and tenured faculty for at least one course per term. The Department also decided to continue with peer review (its alternative teaching evaluation method).

In terms of other universities, the results found here suggest the following for an institution that is converting or has recently converting from in-class evaluations to online evaluations. First, if there are not high response rates for in-class evaluations (e.g., 70 percent or higher), then having low response rates for the online evaluations is not an issue because neither form of evaluation is likely to be valid and reliable. Second, for institutions that have high response rate for in-class evaluations, the response rates of online evaluations need to be comparable with the former in order for them to be valid and reliable and efforts need to be taken to do this, including both “carrots” (e.g., completion of online evaluations by a given student allows him or her to register early for the next term) and “sticks” (e.g., the grades for a given student are not released until his or her online evaluations are completed).

Endnotes

1. Carmines and Zeller (1979) make several distinctions regarding validity. Here, I use what they term “face validity” (Carmines and Zeller 1979: 53). This is the type of validity that focuses on the extent to which an instrument looks like what it is intended to measure. For purposes of this analysis, therefore, the face validity of online evaluations is addressed relative to what they should look like: the in-class evaluations. Carmines and Zeller (1979: 13) also note that validity is not an all or nothing concept, but, rather, a matter of degree. It is this degree that, in turn, is related to reliability, which Carmines and Zeller (1979: 11-12) describe as the ability of an instrument to yield the same measurements when used repeatedly. They also note that of the two types of error that affect
reliability, random and non-random error, it is the latter that lies at the heart of
the question of validity.

For purposes of this analysis, the online evaluations are reliable if they yield
consistent estimates of the corresponding in-class evaluations. Thus, for the
online evaluations to be both valid and reliable they should consistently have the
same proportional distribution of responses as the in-class evaluations.

2. Item #11 is structured as follows: “How would you rate the instructor’s overall
performance in this course?  A. Superior  B. Excellent  C. Good
D. Marginal  E. Poor”

Constraints on time and resources required that only a limited portion of the
evaluation instrument be evaluated in this preliminary analysis. Item #11 was
selected as the focus of this evaluation because it is the most general of the
eleven items and, as such, arguably the item used most often. This focus should
not be construed as the enshrinement of item #11 as the single item of interest
in the evaluation instrument.

3. The online evaluations report only percents by response category (A, B, C, D, E)
within each item. However, the number responding to each item is provided,
which means that the number within each response category can be found by
dividing the reported percentage by 100 and multiplying this dividend by the
reported number responding. This procedure was done for each response
category within Item #11 for each of the nine courses. Results are shown in
Table 1.

4. Intra-evaluator reliability simply means that the student should provide the same
response to the same question in the online evaluation as was provided in the in-
class evaluation.

5. The model violates to some degree two of the basic assumptions underling OLS
regression (i.e., it uses an ordinal level variable as the independent variable and
exhibits heteroskedasticity), but OLS regression is fairly robust and works well
in the face of such violations. In the case of the heteroskedasticity found here
(the variance of the dependent variable tends to increase as the value of the
independent variable increases), the effect is to increase the standard error of the
regression coefficient (i.e., to make a Type II error more likely). Because we
rejected the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between “Response” and
“Diff” (p=.001), this makes the issue of committing a Type II error moot. All-
in-all, I judge the model shown in Exhibit 2 to be adequate for this analysis.

6. It is the case that even the in-class evaluations are fragile in terms of sample
size. For example, SOC 621 had 14 students enrolled. If the response rate was
70 percent for this course, we would have only 10 students providing
evaluations and a shift of two students up or down could have dramatic effects
on the overall evaluation. With only two students responding online for this
class, the saving point for both the in-class and online evaluations was that everyone in the class rated the instructor as either superior or excellent.

7. All data are available on request from the author. The data used to generate the regression model are in an SPSS file and the data used to generate the Index of Dissimilarity and the Online Response Bias are in an Excel file.

8. Shortly after the circulation of the results of this around the university, concerted efforts were undertaken to increase the response rates for online evaluations. After some experimentation with different mixes of “carrots and sticks,” a combination was found such that the institution-wide response rates for online evaluations achieved the same as were found for in-class evaluations within two years of implementing the online evaluation system. This represents a positive outcome for the research reported here.

Author Note

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