

Summary Report on the Third National
Meeting on Future Directions in Developmental Education:
Grants, Research, Diversity, and Multiculturalism

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Abstract

This report summarizes the proceedings and outcomes of the third Meeting on Future Directions in Developmental Education. On November 16-17, 2002, 40 participants met in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to follow up on the initiatives of the first two national meetings. The meeting followed two theme tracks: brainstorming grants and research, and promoting diversity and multiculturalism research in developmental education. Outcomes included developing ideas for grants and research and a national initiative for diversity and multiculturalism in developmental education.

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Developmental Education: Grants, Research, Diversity, and Multiculturalism

In a continuation of two past meetings on “Future Directions in Developmental Education,” co-sponsored by the University of Minnesota-General College and the Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy (CRDEUL), 40 regional and national leaders met a third time on November 16-17, 2002. This summary report outlines the background, proceedings, and outcomes of this meeting, with a focus on future initiatives for the field.

The first meeting in October 1999 included 20 regional and national leaders with expertise in access issues for students transitioning into postsecondary education programs. They identified 16 themes, including histories of developmental education, future research, and theoretical frameworks. Participants met to brainstorm and create recommendations. Four major themes emerged in the first meeting: research, policy and practice, collaboration and community partnerships, and theoretical perspectives. A second meeting was held in April 2001 to expand upon those and recommend future action. Proceedings of past meetings are available on CRDEUL’s web site (<http://www.gen.umn.edu/research/crdeul/publications.htm>).

At the third meeting in November 2002 participants continued conversations around two themes: grants and research, and diversity and multiculturalism. This time 40 leaders from a variety of subject areas and organizations met to develop specific action plans for the coming year. The meeting’s outcomes included identifying grants and research topics as well as future directions for multiculturalism and diversity in

developmental education. Action plans were also developed as part of this meeting, intended to focus more specifically on the means toward achieving change in these defined issues.

Grants and Research

In an increasingly conservative political climate that continues to erode away at progressive programs and policies, such as developmental education and higher education student access initiatives, a group of 20 leaders at the third Future Directions Meeting met specifically to address future needs in the areas of grants and research. Facilitators of this session were David Arendale, David Caverly, and Dana Britt Lundell. This theme track focused on brainstorming topics, prioritizing interests, defining potential grants collaborations, and developing significant research questions.

Topics

In the brainstorming session, participants developed the following list of potential topics for future grants and research. This list is intended to provide ideas for future studies, while simultaneously demonstrating the rich cross-section of research interests represented by leaders from across the nation and from various developmental education organizations. Participants recommend that these kinds of studies be developed, with particular attention paid to responsively and creatively addressing current political trends and involving a range of program types where appropriate. The list is presented here in full to provide a broad range of ideas broadly to anyone interested in engaging in meaningful work in the field.

- Access and Urban Literacy
- Diversity and Multiculturalism
- Adult Literacy
- Assessment, Evaluation, and the Culture of Assessment
- Partnerships (two- and four-year, P-16 programs)
- English Language Learners and Developmental Education

- Research Methodology
- Evaluation Models, their Adaptability, and Dissemination of Local Research
- Defining and Assessing Learner Outcomes
- Training and Professional Development
- History and Information Gathering about the Profession
- Certification Initiatives, Dissemination and Archiving
- National Dissemination Tools, Evaluation Documents, Resources, Databases
- Faculty Development and Teaching Certification
- Disability Research
- Developmental Education across two- and four-year Programs
- Role of Administration, Attitudes and Knowledge, Professional Development
- Developmental Education and its Impact on Students' Lives In and Out of Programs
- Qualitative Studies About Students and Programs
- Access Research in the Sciences
- Mentoring and Developing New Professionals
- Developmental Education and Connections to Higher Education Initiatives
- Cognitive Processes and Instructional Methods
- Economic Impact of Developmental Education
- Development of a National Center for Student Learning
- Institutional Research, Policy and Funding
- Connection of Developmental Education to Mainstream
- Academic Professionalism and Disseminating Information about Best Practices
- Politics and Data-Driven Decisions (Trend Towards Evidence-Based Policies)
- Increasing Numbers of Developmental Education Students Nationally

Priorities

In the next session, grants and research participants prioritized these lists and identified patterns that related more specifically to their own areas of interest and expertise. These included partnerships, dissemination and information, assessment, national studies, training, status of the profession, and interdisciplinary research.

Partnerships. There is a need to develop multi-site, multi-regional partnerships in future grants and research. There have been no broad-based national research studies in the field conducted since the National Study of Developmental Education (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997), and this scale of project is important to continue to update information and knowledge about student learning and the profession. It will be important to add to the recent work on best practices (Boylan, 2002) by providing updated information about

the impact of these practices on students. Additionally, the formation of multi-level (two-year, four-year, P-16) collaborations are important to develop, specifically in response to current and future political trends that target various portions of this continuum.

Researchers and partners must also become more informed about the trends in federal and state funding, as well as learning about private foundations and their role and history of supporting access initiatives.

Dissemination and information. The collection and archiving of paper and electronic documents central to the field's work is becoming increasingly important to address. The changing definitions and evolving nature of the work of educators challenge the act of gathering and disseminating information, especially as it relates to grants and research. Areas such as evaluation, history, theory, resources, research, and best practices are some examples of the kinds of issues at the foundation of access education.

Determining the best way to consolidate and make this information useful and accessible in a variety of formats is a challenge that needs to be addressed. There are presently a variety of sites that house statistics on higher education (e.g., U.S. Department of Education), centralize and categorize research [Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)], and historical works (Martha Maxwell Library at National Louis University), as well as publications sponsored by various organizations [(National Association for Developmental Education (NADE), College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), National Center for Developmental Education (NCDE), CRDEUL, and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition)]. However, there is no central place to help navigate, organize, or locate a seminal collection of documents that inform and define the past and present work of developmental educators at this point in time. Finding appropriate models and

establishing the need for this kind of resource base may include developing a national, electronic database or clearinghouse for developmental education and access research and continuing collaborations across institutions to discuss the future of this concept.

Assessment. There is a need to establish developmental educators as national resource experts on assessment. This would require creating more opportunities for professional development related to evaluation and assessment. Given the current political situation, with “standards” and “evidence-based practice” at the forefront, developmental education as a field needs to become more proactive in evaluating itself and also responsive in addressing these concerns. Developing an initiative that would simultaneously help centralize resources and train educators can enhance the field on multiple levels. Additionally, formulating a response to the current language about assessment is an appropriate step for the field to address.

National studies. It is time for the field to develop more research that connects with the larger conversations and organizations in higher education, as well as international access education. Terms like “access” also need to be revisited as a central concept for developmental education as it relates more specifically to social issues, multicultural education, and political trends. Studies can be devised that connect developmental education programs, theories, and pedagogies to this broader conversation, demonstrating the strength of developmental education work for all of higher education. More research also needs to be designed to assess student standpoints on the impact of postsecondary access programs, especially focusing on diversity issues across the curriculum. Finally, the strengths, design, and wide visibility of projects such as the National Center for Developmental Education’s research studies (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997) need to be

continued and complemented with current investigations into access issues for students, teachers, administrators, and student support services.

Training. Another interest in the grants and research group was professional development and mentoring issues. New professionals in the field require mentoring along the continuum of their work in developmental education, from graduate school through their various professional positions. Establishing models for mentoring that can support individuals and also enhance the quality of students' education and higher education programs is an important step for future work in the field. Specifically, mentoring is a concept that is advocated widely for students entering higher education and in high schools, but it is not as widely accepted or enacted for developing professionals. The positive models we apply to our students should also be part of our discussion about emerging professionals. Mentoring also needs to be assessed and implemented, and effective structures need to be developed for professionals as well. Another discussion about training revolved around certification of professionals in developmental education, focusing on the status of the profession and future of the field. These activities have been explored, but perhaps more discussion is needed about the appropriateness and desirability of establishing more certification opportunities for developmental educators.

Status of the field. Another key issue is the ongoing exploration of the field's status and definition, particularly in these conservative political times. How do we maintain our visibility as a profession in higher education? What is our connection to other higher education organizations? Should the individual professional organizations in developmental education consider more collaboration or a possible future merger? These are not simple questions with easy answers, but they remain a priority for leaders in the

field. Specifically, finding ways to influence policy makers who must consider difficult legislative questions related to budgets and programs in higher education is an ongoing concern. Through the visibility of larger grants and national research projects, information can be gathered that addresses larger questions about students and the impact of these programs.

Interdisciplinary research. Another priority among participants was a conversation about increasing the interdisciplinary research in the field, particularly across content areas and also across other domains in higher education that focus on access research. For example, creating collaborations across science programs that emphasize teaching and learning strategies for students in two- and four-year programs can provide a way to articulate the applicability of sound pedagogies in fields that are not traditionally viewed as providing developmental education. Promoting examples of how the processes used to support student learning can effectively span the continuum and cross disciplines is an important future step for the field to begin to articulate its own connection to other areas of higher education. Expanding theoretical frameworks about teaching and learning is a central component of this kind of initiative, and this is an example of a strength that developmental educators have to offer higher education. Designing cross-institutional, multi-regional research studies and model demonstration projects is an important step for educators to take in forwarding the work of the field and increasing its visibility among policy makers.

Collaborations

After participants in the grants and research strand prioritized these ideas, they formed work groups from across institutions and programmatic types to brainstorm and develop significant researchable, and potentially fundable, questions. Six groups formed,

including the following: (a) teaching and learning in the sciences, (b) assessment and evaluation, (c) student learning and professional development, (d) P-16 collaborations, (e) national studies, and (f) dissemination and information.

They developed their topics around five questions:

1. What is the idea?
2. What is the need?
3. What are the benefits?
4. What is the cost?
5. Who is the audience?

Action plans were developed in each of the six groups, emphasizing the need for investigations of future funding opportunities and national, cross-institutional research collaborations. The Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy (CRDEUL) will continue to follow up with participants and pursue relevant projects in partnerships at the regional and national levels.

Diversity and Multiculturalism

During the November 2002 Future Directions Meeting, a second thematic strand met to discuss diversity and multiculturalism, with the goal of developing an action plan for a national initiative on these issues. Facilitators in this theme track were Jeanne Higbee, Karen Miksch, Rashné Jehangir, and Holly Choon Hyang Pettman. The focus points for this group included the following questions:

1. How do we define multiculturalism and diversity for developmental education?
2. How do we foster the principles of multiculturalism according to Dr. James Banks (Banks, 1994, 1997; Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Jordan Irvine, Nieto, Ward Schofield, & Stephan, 2001) in developmental education programs (e.g., positive

intergroup relations, prejudice reduction, developing equity pedagogies, knowledge construction, content integration, empowering school and social structure)?

3. How do we promote the centrality of theory, research, and pedagogies of multiculturalism within developmental education?
4. What issues are most salient for our student, faculty, and staff populations?
5. How can we enhance the visibility of multicultural issues in national organizations?
6. What kinds of multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary collaborations can develop to promote these issues in our field in the areas of grants, research, teaching, and professional development?
7. What are some barriers and challenges for promoting multiculturalism in the field?

Participants in this strand brainstormed these questions as a whole group and then broke into work groups around topics they established related to developmental education. As a result of the conversations in the diversity and multiculturalism sessions, a national initiative, titled Future Directions Multicultural Initiative (FDMI), was launched by Jeanne Higbee, CRDEUL's Faculty Advisor, with the assistance of graduate research assistant Kwabena Siaka. This project focuses on information dissemination, curricular transformation, and research.

Conclusion

In addition to Higbee's FDMI project, Dana Britt Lundell will lead the CRDEUL Advisory Board in the development of future research and best practices in developmental education, following up on the initiatives from the grants and research group. Specifically, the focus will be on encouraging collaborations with institutional partners across the nation. Future versions of the 2002 Future Directions meeting will

include follow-ups as needed with a small group of leaders to continue the work and assessment of the action projects.

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