



Dissertation Title:

The effectiveness of an enhanced model of support in a developmental writing course.

Marcelle Cooper
March 24th 2018

Statement of the Problem

The enrollment of students in developmental courses increased steadily from 2006 to 2013. A reduction in force in 2009 resulted in the elimination of the writing specialist position that was responsible for teaching the developmental writing course. The university contracted an adjunct instructor to teach the course but there was no longer a direct connection to academic support as there had been when the writing specialist was housed in the academic support center. In addition, the adjunct instructor developed course curriculum independently. Many freshmen lacked test taking, note taking, and study skills. Consequently, these students were unprepared for college courses (Alexander & Gray, 2013).

Research Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of the enhanced model of support implemented in the Writing Skills course. The enhanced model of support was implemented in order to increase student achievement and to prepare students for the Composition I course that was a general education requirement.

Background

- University grant writers assessed institutional needs.
- University grant writers submitted a request for funding.
- The grant was awarded to the university.

Enhanced Model of Support

- Hiring a writing specialist
- Hiring writing tutors

Research

- Secondary School performance expectations differed from college performance expectations (Penner, 2013).
- This problem existed since the early days of higher education in the United States (VanOverbeke, 2008).
- Many different remedies have been attempted (Stahl, & Kantner, Armstrong, 2015).

Research Continued

Recommended academic support:

- Tutoring (Peck, Chilvers, & Lincoln, 2010)
- Supplemental Instruction (Hoi Kwan & Downing, 2010)
- Embedded tutors ((Vick, Robles-Pina, Martirosyan, & Kite, 2015)
- Engaging classroom activities (Kane, Tyson, & Zaleski, 2009)
- Writing practice (Kane, Tyson, & Zaleski)

Study Participants

A total of 40 students who completed the Writing Skills developmental course in the fall 2015 and spring 2016 semesters.

Research Question One

In what ways did the enhanced model of support affect the academic achievement of students enrolled in the Writing Skills course?

Data

- Final letter grades of the sample.
- Final letter grades from previous year.

Analysis

A comparison of final letter grades from the Writing Skills course before and after the enhanced model of support. Independent sample *t*-tests were used.

Research Question Two

In what ways did the enhanced model of support affect the academic achievement of students enrolled in Composition I, following successful completion of the Writing Skills course?

Data:

- Final letter grades of the sample
- Final letter grades from the previous year

Analysis:

A comparison of final letter grades from the Composition I course before and after the enhanced model of support. Again, independent sample *t*-tests were used.

Research Continued

- Developmental students were unprepared for college courses (Stahl, Kantner, & Armstrong, 2015).
- Developmental students often lacked study, testing, and note-taking skills (Turner & Thompson, 2014).
- Developmental students are less likely to seek assistance even when they are aware of it (Godfrey & Tony, 2008).

RQ1 Findings:

Students who did not receive the enhanced model of support during the Writing Skills course ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 3.66$) did not do as well as those who did ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 3.78$), $t(68) = -.88$, $p > .05$.

Scores Past and Present

| Group | <i>N</i> | Mean |
|-------|----------|------|
| 1 | 30 | 4.50 |
| 2 | 40 | 5.30 |

Average grades past and present

| Group | Letter Grade |
|-------|--------------|
| 1 | C- |
| 2 | C |

RQ2 Findings:

Students who did not receive the enhanced model of support before moving to the Composition I course ($M = 4.81, SD = 2.95$) did not do as well as those who did ($M = 5.56, SD = 2.96$), $t(32) = -.73, p > .05$.

Scores past and present

| Group | <i>N</i> | Mean |
|-------|----------|------|
| 1 | 16 | 4.81 |
| 2 | 18 | 5.56 |

Average grades past and present

| Group | Letter Grade |
|-------|--------------|
| 1 | C- |
| 2 | C |

Limitations

- The study did not determine which enhancements are most or least effective.
- The study included only one year of data for each course.
- The classroom was not equipped with technology.
- The instructor relocated the class twice.
- Students did not always move directly to Composition I.
- Final grades were reported as letter grades, not percentages.

Conclusions

- Writing Skills student achievement increased by 18%.
- Composition I student achievement increased by 16%.
- These results exceeded the expectation outlined in the grant award document of 5% per grant year.

Implications

- Students who took the Composition I course in direct succession to the Writing Skills course received an average of C.
- Students who did not take Composition I in direct succession to the Writing Skills course also received an average of C.

Recommendations

- Select a stair-stepped implementation plan.
- Use percentages instead of letter grades.
- Complete construction and installation of technology first.
- Conduct a longitudinal study.
- Conduct a study of the impact of recruiting strategies.
- Conduct a study of the impact of athletic participation.

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