

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS TEACHING COLLEGE COMPOSITION: IMPLEMENTING A COLLABORATIVE HIGH SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PROJECT

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The idea seemed simple enough. Take advantage of the fact that there are a great many high school seniors, impatient to start their college work, who are well-enough prepared to handle it, and, if motivated sufficiently, willing to undertake it. Add to that high school teachers, looking for a challenge, who are talented and knowledgeable enough to stimulate their students to do college work. Mix with a university administration and faculty seeking to broaden and deepen their intellectual commitment to public education and as Howard Mehlinger, Dean of the School of Education at Indiana University said, "This may be the first proposal I have seen since becoming dean in which everybody wins. It may enhance the proportion of students who elect to attend college, and it could ease the shock of the first college semester. It will

strengthen school-college cooperation: there can never be too much of this.”

That was the beginning of the Advance College Project (ACP), a cooperative program between Indiana University and high schools in Indiana wherein selected high school teachers came to campus for summer seminars in their disciplines, high school students applied for specific courses in English composition, mathematics or chemistry where they would earn dual high school-college credit, and public school and university officials worked out the administrative details. Based on a similar project begun in 1972 at Syracuse University, the Advance College Project was initiated at Indiana University in 1982 by Dr. Leslie Coyne, Director of the Office of Summer Sessions. Enlisting faculty coordinators in English, Mathematics and Chemistry, he began contacting school administrators to determine their interest in participating in the project. Six high schools agreed to participate in the pilot year: Bloomington High School North, Bloomington High School South, Bedford-North Lawrence, Elkhart Central, Elkhart Memorial, and Martinsville High School.

What was immediately clear was that if the project were to succeed it would genuinely have to be undertaken collaboratively. Although the university participants had taken the initiative to begin to put the project together, the input of the participating schools and particularly the participating teachers would have to be integrated into the program as it was tried out and developed.

By definition, a pilot year for any new project is a time for trying out and evaluating ideas and approaches. Having been asked to be the English coordinator for the composition component, I began to plan for the summer seminar when the first group of English teachers would arrive. Many questions immediately came to mind. Which of the composition curricula currently being used on the Bloomington campus should be taught to the high school students? What kinds of assumptions could be made about the preparation of the teachers to teach college composition? How much time in the seminar should be spent on theoretical issues? How much time on practical issues? What would be the complexities of translating a college class which met two or three times a week to a high school class which met five times a week? How much individual variation would the high school teachers want to build into their curriculum? How would the attitudes and skills of the high school students compare with their college

counterparts? What kind of evaluation program should be built into the project to investigate comparability of curriculum and performance so that the students' transcripts bearing three credits of composition from Indiana University would be recognized and accepted by colleges and universities to whom the students would wish to transfer the credit?

From the very start, comparability of experience and performance for the students was the central focus. The high school students should engage in the same types and numbers of writing activities as the university students. They should be instructed from the same philosophical perspective and evaluated on the same academic standards. Since the curriculum options in the campus composition course were all process-centered, and since I was frankly most familiar and comfortable with the syllabus based on my textbook, *Reading, Writing, and Reasoning*, I selected the reading-writing syllabus currently being used on campus as the basis for instruction in the Advance College Project classes. This approach had the advantage of integrating reading materials into writing instruction and enough flexibility to allow individual instructors to select some of the readings on which the writing would be based.

As part of an extensive evaluation plan, Janice Lave, evaluator for the project, conducted interviews with the participating teachers during the first week of the on-campus seminar held in June 1982 to document their expectations about the project and their reasons for participating. Typical comments from her 1982 report included the following: "It sounded challenging to me as a teacher"; "It sounded prestigious, good professionally"; "Liked idea of having affiliation with University." These comments reflect the need often unrecognized by others that secondary teachers wish to participate more fully as active professionals in their own discipline. The teachers also felt that the project would have important effects on their students: "Good opportunity for students to learn what is expected of them in college"; "Advance College Project may influence for some students the decision to go or not to go to college. Majority will reinforce fact that they can succeed in college"; "Give students a chance to gain maturity before parents send them to college"; ". . . since students will realize IU is giving them credit, they will feel we . . . are doing something of value which IU recognizes." Along with these positive expectations, the teachers were aware of some potential difficulties: "Difficult to get started considering the amount of

preparation involved as a teacher. It will be worthwhile once we master it"; "Expect there will be problems. Adjustments for the students. Students will be surprised by the amount of work they have to do. For me, I will have to make changes in approach"; "Other faculty members in high school may have concerns. Will need to tread water for a few months. There may be jealousy from other high school faculty." Thus armed with optimism, but tempered with realism, the initial project group came together for the first summer seminar.

In addition to the high school teachers and myself, other participants in the seminar included two Indiana University English Department faculty members who would make on-site visits to the high schools during the next year and administrative participants in the program who provided information on course registration and other details. The seminar activities were organized around four areas: theoretical underpinnings for the course philosophy, examination and practice with the instructional materials, discussion of evaluation criteria for student writing, and design of an individual syllabus by each instructor. Since one of the important outcomes for the university participants was to develop a better understanding of the classroom contexts within which high school English teachers work, taking time in the seminar to plan a syllabus with each individual teacher gave us real insight into how tasks must be designed and sequenced to fit into high school instructional patterns.

Because the composition course itself was based on current theoretical models of reading and writing as both process-centered and constructive in nature, the first few days of the seminar were spent in giving the teachers an opportunity to familiarize themselves with some theoretical readings (Yetta M. Goodman and Carolyn Burke's *Reading Strategies: Focus on Comprehension*, Chapter 1, and Lee Odell's article "Defining and Assessing Competence in Writing"). These discussions were followed by reading, discussing and trying out the reading and writing activities in the textbook. Although by the end of the seminar the teachers felt that actually practicing some of the tasks they would assign to their students was useful, their initial response to being asked to do so and to share their work with each other resulted in both annoyance and discomfort. The discomfort arose from their experiencing the same kinds of feelings that their students often felt, being exposed and vulnerable to others whom they did not yet know well and with whom they were not certain they

wished to share their work. After an open discussion of these feelings, the teachers remarked that they would have much greater empathy with their students and would try to be more sensitive about creating an environment that would help their students feel more comfortable about sharing their work with each other. The annoyance expressed by some of the teachers in response to being asked to share their work with each other and the IU faculty originated from a sense that they were being judged in this seminar to determine if they were qualified to teach the course. They felt that once their credentials and recommendations had been reviewed by the university that no further evaluation of their qualifications needed to be made. This assessment was basically correct, but as every reviewer of paper credentials knows, there always exists the possibility that additional experience could necessitate a review of previous decisions. Although there was never any intention to view the seminar as a screening activity, and no teacher who has participated in the seminar has been denied an opportunity to participate in the program, the possibility of such a re-evaluation cannot be totally excluded. Once these concerns were aired and defused, the seminar participants used the sharing of task responses to openly discuss the desirability of a range of responses (sometimes even the most unexpected ones) to the assignments.

Following these activities, discussion turned to evaluation criteria for the writing assignments. A range of student responses to the tasks in the textbook had been collected and copies were distributed to the teachers. They were each asked to read and respond to the papers as they normally would and evaluative criteria were developed within the group. During these sessions one of the methods for evaluating the program was described to the teachers. Students enrolled in the Advance College Project would be given a pre-test and post-test writing task at the beginning and end of semester in which the course was offered. Since the papers were to be on the same general topic, abuses of power, with different individual focuses for each writing, the papers could be mixed and evaluated without the eventual raters knowing which were written at the beginning and which at the end of the semester. At the same time as the ACP students were writing these papers, students enrolled in five on-campus sections would undertake the same tasks under the same conditions, two days of in-class monitored writing. The papers of both groups would be mixed and coded and rated holistically. Thus an

evaluation of student writing could be added to the assessment of the program which already planned to include teacher perceptions, student perceptions, and on-site class visits.

Some difficulties later arose with the implementation of the pre- and post-test writing activities. Although I had believed that the discussion within the seminar and the memo accompanying the writing task had described the conditions under which the writing samples would be collected, there was some variation in the ways in which the task was administered (one teacher allowing the students to take the first draft home to revise for the post-test) and some variation in how the pre-test was used. The teachers had been told that they could use the pre-test instructionally as they would any early sample of writing collected in a composition course, but some felt they should not do so. There was general agreement by the teachers that the students did not take the writing of the post-test very seriously since they were bored by having to repeat the same task and so close to graduation that "senioritis" appeared to have taken over. Also, some of the teachers turned out to be uncertain whether the post-test papers should be graded and counted in the final course evaluation. Therefore, the teachers were concerned that the evaluation of the post-test writing sample would not be a valid indicator of the students' performance. Unfortunately, these misgivings did not become known until after the seminar for the second year's participants had been concluded, so the same pre-test and post-test tasks were carried over to the second year of the project. However, it was decided that these papers would be looked at from a different perspective. A doctoral student in composition at Indiana University, James Anderson, is developing a descriptive report on the students' writing using the four dimensions of the Crediton Model developed by Andrew Wilkinson and his associates: cognitive, stylistic, affective, and moral. This description will provide a unique opportunity to explore developmental processes in writing by a population of high school and college students who have received the same instruction and who are writing on the same tasks.

The final component of the seminar was the design of an individual syllabus by each teacher. This, too, proved to be more complicated than had been envisioned. Because planning for the Advance College Project had begun late in the 1981-82 academic year for implementation in the fall of 1982, individual arrangements had been made with some of

the schools participating in the pilot year. Although the course was designed to be offered as a discrete one-semester composition course as it is on the university campus, two of the high schools had been given permission to integrate the writing tasks into already existing courses since it was too late to re-register students for a discrete course. One of the schools offered a year-long senior English course consisting of both literature and composition and the other offered a one-semester senior honors course in literature with associated writing. In both courses, some of the readings from the composition textbook were substituted for the originally planned course readings and all writing tasks were structured along the lines of the ACP course. Both schools agreed to restructure their offerings the following year to follow the plan of the university course and this has been done. These variations plus others demonstrated the usefulness of the time spent in the seminar developing the individual syllabi and many useful questions about issues such as pacing and number of papers were explored. The syllabi that evolved were perceived as tentative because everyone realized that the pacing and implementation of the course could only be worked out in its initial teaching.

At the close of the seminar plans were made for two meetings the first semester and one meeting the second semester for all participants to share their experiences and questions with each other. In addition, an on-site visit was scheduled for each school in the semester(s) in which the course would be taught.

During the fall semester, the teachers returned twice to campus. At the first meeting, they discussed general implementation problems and shared papers with each other that their students had written in response to the initial tasks of the course. Among the implementation issues that arose, the most serious seemed to be about the complex process of registering the students and the lack of information made available to students through the counselling offices of the high schools about the course. It was decided that the high schools would be asked to provide administrative support for the teachers so that they did not have to handle the details of course registration. The teachers believed that they could be the best advocates for the course and offered to speak to junior classes about the course prior to the students' making registration decisions for the following year.

At the end of the pilot year, Janice Lave re-interviewed

the teachers, administered an evaluative questionnaire to the participating students, and assessed in a 1983 report the results of the holistic evaluation of the pre- and post-test writing samples. Her interviews indicated that the English composition teachers were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the course that they had taught. They all felt that the ACP course was appropriate for most of the students who enrolled for college credit. The teachers felt that the high school students possessed the necessary entry-level skills in terms of both academic ability and emotional maturity. Among their comments on the impact of the course on their students were the following points: it was an answer to senioritis; it increased their self-esteem; students were transferring new skills learned to other classes; by the end of the semester, students became more capable of doing independent work; they took writing assignments more seriously, putting more time in writing and revising. Some effects were less consistently observed. For example, some students benefited from realizing the pressure of a college situation, evoking a positive outcome, but for others, the outcome was negative; a few students concluded that college was not for them and decided not to enroll.

When students were asked why they decided to enroll in the college composition course, most indicated that they wanted to get a head start on college. Some specific reasons they gave for enrolling in the course were to learn what a college course was like, to earn dual credit — high school and college, to learn to write better and to be challenged. One student commented that he made his decision in “a moment of sheer madness.” When asked whether the course met their expectations, the students’ comments varied: some indicated that they learned more than they would have in a normal English course and that the experience made them feel more confident; in regard to how challenging the course was, some felt that the course gave them a better understanding of a college’s expectations, but others felt that the course was a little easier than they had expected, one student remarking, “I think I expected something impossible to accomplish.” Of the 255 students enrolled, 71% revealed that they were “very glad” that they had taken the course, 20% were “somewhat glad,” 6% were “a little sorry,” and 2% stated that they wished they “hadn’t enrolled in the course.” Some of the reasons for their dissatisfaction were that they felt they would have gotten more out of the course in a college classroom or that they

didn't learn what they expected to. When asked if they would recommend ACP courses to other high school students, 87% said they would recommend the experience of taking courses for college credit, 9% were uncertain and 4% indicated that they would not. In stating a favorable recommendation, one student commented on the effect of taking the course in a high school setting: "This course is better to take in high school because you and your teacher have a close relationship that makes it easier for students to ask more questions." Students who were uncertain about recommending the course indicated that it was an individual decision for each student to make, commenting that "it depends on the maturity of the student and the teaching ability of the teacher." A logical question to ask is whether the students' final grade affected their attitude toward the course. It was not surprising that 95% of those who received an A or B and 84% of those who received a C were very glad or somewhat glad that they took the course, but 55% of those who received a D or F had the same positive response. And even more surprising, 82% of those who received a D or F would recommend the course to other high school students.

In the summer of 1983, the pre-test and post-test papers of the high school students had been coded and randomly mixed with the papers written by the on-campus students in five freshman composition sections using the same instructional materials (5-7). Twenty-eight independent raters were trained to use a holistic rating approach to categorize the writing samples into one of four levels of writing competency. Each essay was rated independently by three raters. The raters were not aware of which population wrote the essay (high school or college student) or whether it was the pre-test or post-test sample. The only identifier on each writing sample was the student's identification number. The results of the rating for the two groups showed that there was no significant difference between the groups for either the pre-test or post-test performance. What this indicated was that as a total group the high school students were starting at a level of performance comparable to the university students and ending the course similarly with a performance comparable to the university students. Thus from a gross quantitative perspective it could be said that the evaluation demonstrated that the high school students were capable of college level work. Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, there was dissatisfaction with this type of evaluation and a more qualitative assessment is

being undertaken to evaluate the performance of the students participating in the second year of the project.

In a follow-up study of the pilot year, students were asked whether they now felt (after one semester of college) that it was worthwhile to have taken the English composition course. Eighty-four percent responded that it was very worthwhile, 10% that it was somewhat worthwhile, and 4% that it was not worthwhile, figures even more supportive of the project than the students' initial perceptions. The transfer of the credit hours to other universities and colleges had been successful for 87% of the students. Reasons why the credit hours had not been accepted for the other students included university policies where such transfer credit was not normally accepted and grades that were too low. Only 14 students reported a failure in having their transfer credit accepted.

In planning for the second year of the project, Les Coyne, the director, decided that it would be more informative and efficient to invite representatives from school districts considering participation in the project to a luncheon and afternoon meeting on the university campus rather than contacting each school district separately. Accordingly, superintendents, principals, teachers and counselors were invited to an informational meeting during the fall semester of 1983. After a general get-together in which the overall program was described, smaller group meetings were set up for administrators and discipline area teachers. As a result of these contacts, five more schools decided to offer the English composition course for the next year: Mitchell, Warren Central, Carmel, Columbus East and Noblesville High Schools. (The original six pilot year schools also all agreed to continue in the program.)

Some of the changes in the second summer seminar reflected experiences both in the high schools and on campus. The on-campus curriculum had been modified to include readings from *The Little, Brown Reader* and the teachers were shown the new syllabus currently being used on campus. Because it was felt that the experience of the pilot year teachers in actually implementing the course in the high schools would be extremely useful to the new group of teachers, one of the pilot year teachers, Joanne Frye from Bloomington High School North, was invited to participate in the seminar for two days. In their evaluation of the seminar, the teachers commented on the usefulness of having a previous teacher there to share her implementation experiences. They also

noted that getting to know the two IU faculty members who would visit their schools made them feel more comfortable about visits. One teacher commented, "It would have been more difficult if we hadn't met them or if they hadn't gone through the same process with us" (Lave, 1984).

At the conclusion of the seminar, arrangements were made for two meetings during the fall semester with the second year group of teachers. A meeting was also planned for the spring semester at which the first and second year teachers would have an opportunity to meet and exchange their experiences. (We saw these campus meetings as an opportunity to begin to create a network of high school English teachers in the state who would share interests and experiences.) The on-site visits continued during the second year for both first and second year teachers.

On March 2, 1984, the ACP English teachers from years one and two met with the English faculty and university administrators associated with the program. Discussion centered around the dissatisfaction with the pre-test/post-test task and method of evaluation (Winkler). After considerable discussion, some changes in the substance and format were agreed upon: two topics would be made available with half the class writing on one and half writing on the other at the beginning of the semester; at the end of the semester students would write on the alternate topic. The pre-test would be used instructionally by all teachers and the post-test would be used as part of the students' evaluation in the course. Teachers hoped that grading the post-test would increase the students' motivation. The group decided that continuing the site visits each year would reinforce the collaborative nature of the program between the university and the participating high schools. Although the basic text would remain the same for the third year of the project, teachers were encouraged to feel flexible about the readings to be incorporated into the course.

In thinking back over the project's first two years and looking toward the third year when seven more schools will join (Mishawaka, John Adams, Zionsville, Crawfordsville, Penn, Pike, and Shelbyville High Schools) it is possible to reflect on the nature of collaborative university-high school projects and their potential for affecting positively all of the participants. From the university's perspective a great deal was gained. First, we have come to know English teachers from across the state of Indiana. They have made us understand the complex and often trying environment in which

they work. They have earned our respect and admiration for their commitment to their students and their discipline. We will never read the comments and criticisms leveled against public education dispassionately again; we will know from experience that there are many dedicated and capable teachers in our public school system. From the perspective of the high schools, one of the second year teacher's responses echoed those Dean Mehlinger made before the program began. In the teacher interviews, she said, "I enjoy being part of the project. Enjoyed the seminar and the meetings and the people I met. And the kids that took W131 last semester made it enjoyable. They don't track students in this high school. To get all good kids in one class was a dream. They were all enthusiastic students who responded to the teaching (Lave, 8)." Perhaps it is possible for everyone to win.

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Participants in the Advance College Project:

High schools:

Bloomington High School North — Joanne Frye and Carole Sefrin

Bloomington High School South — Lady Ann Loudenback and Phyllis Clapacs

Bedford-North Lawrence — Byron Buker and Richard Inman
Martinsville — Fred Cline

Elkhart Memorial — Eleanor Bell and William Haslem

Elkhart Central — Cheryl Menzel

Carmel — Janie Sims and Janis Groth

Columbus East — Claudis Shafer and Shirley Richards

Mitchell — Corky Herbert

Noblesville — Alice Shoemaker

Warren Central — Shirley Young

Crawfordsville — Marjorie Schott

John Adams — Ann Germano and Paulette Cwidak

Mishawaka — Elizabeth Favorite and Shirley Ross

Penn — Gordon Schermer and David Tydgat

Pike — Robert Steven Green

Shelbyville — Marilyn Willeford and Debra Shell

Zionsville — Betty Dean

Indiana University (Bloomington)

Marilyn Sternglass — English Department

William Wiatt — English Department

Lewis Miller — English Department

Raymond Hedin — English Department

Leslie Coyne — Project Director

Kathi Lee — Administrative Assistant

Dorothy Winkler — Assistant Director

Janice Lave — Director of Research and Evaluation
Loretta Condra — Budget Coordinator
Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis
(Columbus campus)
Judith Spector — English Department
Indiana University (South Bend)
Thomas Van der Ven — English Department

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