

The Library and Remedial/Developmental/ Compensatory Education: A Case Study

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Introduction

"En casa de herrero, cuchillo de palo."

—Spanish proverb

IT IS FITTING TO FIND inspiration in a Spanish proverb for an article that deals with how far the arm of the library reaches out to the college student who is deficient in academic skills. Translated, the proverb states, "in the home of the blacksmith, only knives made of wood are used." The humor of incongruence as one visualizes the use of "wooden knives" is similar to what educational systems have been doing with those labeled as disadvantaged or academically deficient students. In addition, a look at the library's participation or lack of it in remedial, compensatory or developmental programs makes one wonder if educators are using "wooden knives" when more adequate tools would be appropriate.

A final application of the "wooden knives" concept is the style and approach of this article. While written by a librarian and an educator, the research approach and the style are not the traditional fare. A review of the literature yielded minimal entries on the topic of libraries playing a leadership or active role in planning, designing and implementing a "remedial," "developmental" or "compensatory" education program in a college or community college setting. Furthermore, few of the

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papers presented at conferences or articles published were written by librarians. The library's role in developmental education programs—if significant—results in a name change for the library. The library becomes known as a “learning center,” a “reading lab,” a “study skills lab.” This phenomenon is important. If the library is called something other than a library, the administration of such service is frequently in the hands of a nonlibrarian, a discipline faculty member—with discipline (i.e., content) knowledge but no administrative, supervisory preparation or experience; or may be in the hands of a dean, director or chairperson with academic, administrative experience but who holds an education degree instead of a library science degree.

Rippy and Truett's work on a survey of Texas community college libraries found that the role of the library in remedial education was a “neglected topic.”¹ The neglect is not only in lack of research and/or articles. The delivery of services to address the needs of academically deficient college students has not been identified and integrated formally with the mission of a library in a community college setting. Yet, and fortunately, informal arrangements between developmental educators and librarians have taken place. The rest of this article is a telling of how, when and why it happened at the North Campus of Miami-Dade Community College (M-DCC).

The Story

Once upon a time a natural-born teacher decided to become a librarian because she did not want to teach. However, as career histories go, the librarian became a reference librarian who developed and taught the first library instruction course at the North Campus Library of Miami-Dade Community College. The experience acquired during those early years as a reference/instruction librarian indicated that the academically underprepared student was the most likely to become frustrated with library assignments. With the vigor that youth afforded, this librarian did two things: (1) decided to become a library administrator, and (2) wrote a mini-grant for the use of staff and program development funds to integrate the library with the instruction of all students, but more specifically with the instructional support services academically deficient students needed to succeed in college. The report that describes this mini-grant project follows, and it is reproduced in its entirety as documentation of how a librarian conceived the challenge of swimming against the educational opinion tide that urges that libraries have no mission in developmental education.

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The Project

Project Topic: Reaching the Developmental Student Through Print Resources: New Library Services for Classroom Faculty

Project Director: Celia C. Suarez

Background:

The North Campus identified retention of students and developmental education as goal priorities for the academic year 1977-78. In response to these two Campus priorities, the Reference Librarians identified "library research assignments" as an appropriate instruction tool for the Library to reach developmental students and address the retention issue at the same time.

The experience of the M-DCC-North Campus Reference Librarians indicates that the academically underprepared student is the most likely to become frustrated with Library assignments. Below-average scores in reading logically indicate that these students have previously seldom used the Library for academic and/or personal growth reasons. Therefore, to this student, the Library resources, the methodology of research and the classification of knowledge for purposes of efficient information retrieval are *all unfamiliar*. It is easy to fail and become frustrated in unfamiliar, and, traditionally, the most learned of environments, the Library. Failure breeds frustration, whereas success in completing Library assignments generates feelings of accomplishment that increase motivation for further learning. The student who uses the Library successfully is also a morale booster for the faculty because he/she can see tangible evidence of new cognitive or affective levels the student has reached.

A number of strategies are presently employed by the Library Program Department to alleviate this problem and reach the students: orientation tours are arranged by faculty request, class presentations on Library subject collections are offered and reference Librarians do provide tutorial services when time allows. These strategies are not as efficient nor effective as one that addresses the issue at the point of origin: The Library assignment a faculty member will prepare for use by an entire class. The Librarians and faculty support staff can assist the faculty and provide the services that will result in Library assignments that take into account variable Library resources and methodologies available to meet the different developmental stages of students in one class. Patterns of life-long learning habits will develop in students, and, perhaps with time, recruitment efforts and retention concerns will become less pressing to North Campus as returning alumni continue their quest for personal and professional growth in our midst—taking courses or doing independent research in the Library.

Project Proposal:

To reach an estimated 2,000 academically underprepared, gifted and/or average students, the Library will conduct Library Instruction sessions for faculty members in selected Arts & Sciences departments

and those teaching Developmental Studies courses. The aim of this instruction is to assist faculty in the design of Library assignments that students can do by using variable methodologies of research and resources that are matched to the different reading, comprehension skills of the target population.

Project Description:

Six Librarians worked together to design three consecutive workshops covering the following:

1. Basic Instruction in Services and Resources Available at North Campus Library.
2. Practical Application: Exercises, Annotated Bibliographies of selected reference books and recommended titles for use with Developmental Studies.
3. The Mechanics of Library Assignment:
 - a. The motivational role of faculty in stimulating students to use the Library.
 - b. Need for information exchange with students about the organization of knowledge in the Library.
 - c. Introduce the availability of variable resources and multiple subjects, e.g., *Do Not* assign a whole class to do research on one obscure American Indian tribe.
 - d. Tools available (Subject Access to Card Catalog and Periodical Indexes and Reference Collection).
 - e. Availability of easy reading materials in fiction, biography, paperback collection, McNaughton rental collection, hobbies, sports, magazine articles.
 - f. Design of Library assignments by each participant for use in selected English, Art, Social Science, Reading and Writing classes. Evaluation questionnaires will be used with faculty and students to ascertain impact of Library Instruction.

The basic thrust of Phase I of this project was to reach students through the unfolding of an instructional partnership/liaison between Librarian and classroom faculty. During the workshops a teacher/learner environment resulted in which all 20 participants reversed roles periodically to exchange views and information in a professional, dynamic manner. The final product of Phase I has been 14 or more assignments jointly designed that will be used with selected fall courses.

Phase II of the project calls for pre-testing the students on Library skills and knowledge, an on-site, course-oriented library instruction session about specific tools and books that the student will use in doing the assignment, and a post-test to evaluate the effectiveness of the assignment and the strategy used to design it.

Project Evaluation:

Faculty participants were asked to fill out an Evaluation Form concerning Phase I. Responses indicated that the workshops were

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excellent and/or very good. Of the three sessions offered, the last workshop was rated as the one having the highest practical value. During this session, faculty and Librarians worked together to plan and actually design a library assignment.

Phase II of the project, upon completion in fall, 1978, will provide data on the students' reaction to the specific assignments and to the approach used by faculty and Librarians to do course oriented Library instruction.

Project Status:

The project will be completed by the end of fall, 1978. The assignments are being finalized for use in the fall classes of the participants. Marcia Myers will work with John Scerba on the evaluation instrument that will be administered to students in the fall.

Overall, the project was intended to create a ripple effect in the Library and with other faculty members. Students with basic skills deficiencies can find the Library a useful resource to improve their reading, writing, and studying skills if Librarians and classroom faculty work together to achieve full utilization of resources.

There are some characteristics of this project that need highlighting before the story gives way to the institutional, community and student profile of the setting where the action unfolds. These characteristics are elements, that, in the concluding section, will be relevant to the framing of a more simple, but wiser, and, probably, more effective approach to the educational structures of the community college as it concerns developmental education.

The project was successful. It was librarian-conceived, -designed, -planned, and -implemented. Classroom faculty did establish a liaison with the library. Additional financial resources were made available for the library to get involved with developmental education. The focus of library instruction was shifted from teaching students to teaching faculty. And, the final characteristic, the library and its collection became a primary, active tool for instruction in relation to diverse disciplines. No "wooden knives" were used in this project.

Institutional Profile for Miami-Dade Community College

In the 1970s, M-DCC was established in the national educational scene as the largest and most innovative community college. Florida had funded its community colleges well during the 1960s according to a legislative plan that divided college education into lower-and upper-division work. Miami-Dade Community College experienced years of tremendous and continuous growth. Though initially conceived as a

community college that would serve 5,000 to 10,000 students, Miami-Dade's enrollment reached and has maintained the 50,000 or over figure, distributed throughout four campuses and numerous outreach centers.

During the 1970s, faculty salaries were not only competitive, but higher than in the public elementary high school, and state university system. The Library at North Campus—the first, and until the 1980s, the largest of the four campuses—was excellent: well funded, and adequately staffed. Then, between 1975 and the dawn of the 1980s, issues began to emerge in the educational scene. *Accountability in Education*, *Basic Skills*, *Remediation*, *Enrollment Decline*, *Collective Bargaining*, *Minority Representation in Faculty and Administrative Ranks*, *End of the Baby Boom*, and *The Decade of Shrinking Dollars and Leadership Changes* with consequent *Curriculum Revision*. These issues were in the 1970s like titles that appear in the "Forthcoming Books" section of *Publishers Weekly*. They were there, but no one had read them.

In the 1980s at M-DCC we not only read the books, we wrote them on all of the above topics. The activity in the late seventies and early eighties was frenzied. In less than five years, 1978-82, M-DCC underwent a major curriculum revision of the general educational program; reinstated college-wide testing programs to assess basic skills of entering freshmen; experienced campus- and college-wide leadership and organizational structure changes from the level of the president downward, and a year later, over 50 percent of the governing board of trustees was new; standards of academic progress were instituted to establish internal quality control on students; enrollment began to decline; and financial resources began to shrink. External factors to M-DCC also began to emerge: legislative activity started to allow upper-division universities to enroll freshmen and sophomores, and an eventual legislative mandate for compulsory exit-level testing for community college degree-seeking students was being considered.

National news deplored the overall quality of education in the nation. Community colleges—because of their open-door admissions policies—did not escape the valid criticisms that college graduates could not read, write or compute. Miami-Dade, however, could point with pride to the achievement of the many first-generation, mostly Black and Hispanic students who—otherwise denied access to higher education—were completing transfer programs and succeeding in upper-division and professional-degree programs. Today in Miami, the mayor of Hialeah, a Cuban-born leader of the largest industrial city in the State of Florida, as well as many other minority civic, political,

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media, and business leaders of Dade County are graduates or were students of the North Campus of Miami-Dade Community College.

Despite these achievements, M-DCC's institutional research projects were unveiling disturbing facts. When in 1981-82, college policy mandated basic skills assessment for all entering freshmen,² data began to document what faculty members had been complaining about: over 50 percent, and on some campuses as high as 70 percent, of students were failing one or all of the three CGP (Comparative Guidance and Placement) tests assessing reading, writing or computational skills.

Remediation: A Chronological Approach with Emphasis on Student Characteristics and the Library's Participation

To complete the description of the milieu where developmental education programs emerged, a profile of the North Campus student is in order. During the 1960s, minority students (only considering figures for Blacks and Hispanics) were indeed a minority at the North Campus. The Office of Institutional Research had no figures available in report form; however, an educated guess would be 80 percent white and 20 percent minority.

The trend change of student characteristics started in the seventies and the following chart illustrates the dramatic reversal in the ethnic composition of M-DCC's enrollment at the North Campus:

TABLE 1
ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF M-DCC'S
NORTH CAMPUS ENROLLMENT

	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>
<i>Fall 1979</i>	38.3%	24.4%	35.3%
<i>Fall 1980</i>	33.5%	25.4%	39.2%
<i>Fall 1983</i>	26.1%	27.5%	44.5%

The student body at the North Campus in 1985 is predominantly Hispanic, over 50 percent female, shows increasing numbers of learning and physically disabled students, and has students with an average age of twenty-five with continuously decreasing numbers of full-time entrants who are recent high school graduates. An additional and very significant characteristic is that approximately 50 percent or more of

those assessed for basic academic skills proficiency perform below the norm on one or all of the competencies tested, which are reading, writing and computing.

Thus, the North Campus has always offered a variety of services and implemented diverse administrative structures to deal with students who are deficient in basic skills. Since the late seventies to the present, however, structural arrangements have increased in importance due to the numbers of basic-skills-deficient students and also due to the legislative mandate for a passing grade in the CLAST (College-Level Academic Skills Test) effective in the State of Florida beginning in the academic year of 1984-85.

As scandalous as it may sound, the library's support of developmental studies services or programs before 1975 was mainly in the area of reference assistance to students researching "sex" as a topic of inquiry. Obviously, the librarians and the faculty teaching those, then called, "compensatory or remedial" courses, were not on the best of terms. In 1975, an organizational structure change facilitated the pursuit of linkages between the library and developmental studies along loftier topics.

A dean of student and learning support services was appointed. His division housed all traditional student services, except registration and admissions, plus the library, audiovisual and all instructional departments that offered basic skills/remedial courses. Services to disabled students, and recruitment and testing were also included in this division. The potential for dissent in such a multifaceted division was tremendous, but it never brewed, due to the warm and competent team-building leadership style of Nicholas Gennett.⁴ The brew he and his team of chairs and directors concocted continues to benefit the "developmental" student, especially if one believes that positive library experiences are necessary and very effective factors in remediating academic deficiencies.

These were the years during which this librarian exercised statewide leadership as Vice-President and President of Florida Developmental Education Association of Community Colleges. This association, founded in 1976, has contributed tremendously to the improvement and integration of the services that help "developmental" students. Furthermore, it has lobbied effectively within institutions and at the state level for the continuation of services to this type of student in the community college population, even though such funding has often been under attack by the state funding arm of education, the Florida legislature.

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All this history may seem irrelevant. However, it is because of these events that in 1983-84, the library succeeded in playing an even more dynamic role in the instructional services offered to students who were in developmental courses in reading and writing. Two brief handouts about the recently created "Information Skills Lab" are reproduced here to fully describe the rationale, the practices, and the organizational structure of this new service for students:

(Handout No. 1) The Information Skills Lab

Rationale

In August 1983, Dr. Robert McCabe, President of Miami-Dade Community College, published a paper entitled "Information Skills for the Information Age: Establishing a Fundamental Emphasis for The Education Program of Miami-Dade Community College."

The following excerpts capture the spirit, tone and direction of the document:

- The college will redesign the educational program to place fundamental emphasis on the development of information skills.
- Virtually all jobs now require the ability to utilize and communicate information.
- It is ever more clear that information skills—finding information, reading it, analyzing it, interpreting it, applying it, and communicating it—are the foundation for living effectively and being employed productively in the information age.
- Individuals must be skilled learners.
- The ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate data requires the ability to read critically, to conceptualize, to form basic conclusions, and to communicate such understanding in writing.
- The objective of assisting each student in development of information skills and competence as an independent learner is to be interwoven into every course offered by the college.
- Writing...demands analysis and coherent synthesis; it requires critical thinking, and forms the basis for developing and refining the information skills which are the essence of academic and occupational pursuits.

Students with deficiencies in the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, are also *very likely* to have deficiencies in their information processing skills. Thus, providing instruction in basic skills, and even improving these skills, is insufficient in developing competent college students and competent citizens in the information age. A comprehensive educational approach is in order.

Miami-Dade Community College has taken leadership in addressing this educational problem.

Toward this end, the Basic Communication Department in the Division of Communication, North Campus, has organized the Information Skills Lab. The Lab provides a systematic approach to improving students' information skills.

Every student enrolled in a basic reading or writing course is required to take the Information Skills Lab. The Lab provides students with a wealth of activities and experiences designed to promote the development of information skills. These activities challenge students to read carefully, think critically, develop alternatives, write accurately and neatly, fulfill responsibilities and develop appropriate habits for successful life in college and the world of work.

(Handout No. 2) Information Skills Laboratory

The Information Skills Laboratory is in operation to provide additional hours and learning activities for students in reading and writing courses. The Information Skills Lab is located on the 2nd floor of the library and the hours open match the schedules of students in REA 0001, REA 0002, ENC 0006, and ENC 0007.

Entering students complete a 12-page reading and writing inventory. When completed, each student is interviewed by a professional who assigns an individualized program of learning activities. The customized program varies depending on the course or courses being taken, whether English is a second language, and whether the student has taken the course before. In addition, the sequence of learning units can be changed as well as the time required for completion.

Satisfactory completion of the reading and writing courses associated with the Information Skills Lab depends on testing—for reading, attainment of at least a 10th grade reading level, for writing, attainment of criterion competencies. For these reasons, the Information Skills Lab assigns only “in-house” grades to students (S-Satisfactory, P-Progress, and U-Unsatisfactory). These tentative grades inform students how well they are progressing in the opinion of the faculty and paraprofessionals. These “grades” are reported to the reading and writing instructors (along with attendance and other information).

The Information Skills Laboratory offers the student a diverse program with units in the following areas:

1. *Use of the library*—from reading a magazine to preparing a short research paper.
2. *College survival skills*—from reading an AGIS report to planning a course of study.
3. *Thinking skills*—develop the ability to pay attention, remember, reason, develop solutions and implement; a preparation for IQ, Achievement, Placement, and CLAST tests.
4. *Personal skills*—these include problem solving methods, motivation, concern for accuracy, as well as developing the assertive behaviors that characterize successful graduates.

The program is coordinated by David Jenrette, who has prepared most of the written materials and assignments. Information Skills Lab modules prepared so far include:

1. Overview and Information Survey
2. Guide to the Library

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3. Shortcut Reading Methods
4. The SQ3R Reading Method
5. Vocabulary unit (Animals and Inventions)
6. Fiction reading assignment
7. Guide to Writing the 500 word essay
8. The PQMR Reading Method
9. Guide to reading magazines
10. ABC Unit (Insights into the Alphabet)
11. Vocabulary (The 100 English words most often misspelled)
12. Simile and Metaphor (Including prefixes)
13. Idioms (word combinations not usually found in dictionaries)
14. Computer Programming
15. A Weekly Journal
16. Literal Algebra

Copies of these modules may be obtained from David Jenrette, Basic Communication Department, Room 6103, North Campus, Miami-Dade Community College.

Some characteristics of this Information Skills Laboratory need highlighting before a more dynamic role is proposed for the library in the conclusions. These characteristics are: (1) for the first time a component of the instructional program of developmental reading/writing courses became housed in the library; (2) assignments for reading improvement required use of a variety of library resources, instead of a workbook, textbook or technological approach; (3) librarians worked closely with the faculty member in charge of the lab in the design of self-instruction packets; and (4) ongoing library instruction sessions for these students are given priority by library administration.

Conclusions: A Librarian's Dream

The ideal approach to developmental education at the North Campus remains unrealized if one recalls the author's bias as expressed in the "wooden knives" illustration. The conclusion of the story is that due to the informal cooperation, the library at the North Campus of M-DCC can claim to be actively involved with the instruction of developmental students. It must be noted, however, that the marriage started when linkages were formal, and the program was placed under a dean of student and learning support services. Since then, the overall organizational structure of the campus has changed and so has the placement of the function of developmental education. However, the bonding that was established between the faculties and the departments of library and developmental studies endured. Thus, the author can describe the following scenario for developmental education at the North Campus of M-DCC.

Instead of reading and writing courses offered by a developmental studies department, the entire library would become a laboratory for self-paced instructional activities organized around the general education curriculum.⁶ The discipline—be it social sciences, humanities, science or technical/vocational studies—would govern and organize the instructional support services for academic-skills-deficient students. Remediation activities would be managed and administered by the most generalist of all the faculty on a campus, the librarian. The discipline faculty would work with the librarians according to a formal organizational structure that would grant the library the leadership role in designing, implementing and evaluating the activity of remediation. All activities would be content-driven, with the vocabulary and concepts of a given discipline acting as the foundation for remediation framed by the library's collection. Heavy emphasis would be placed on guided and supervised reading activities with subsequent writing assignments. Educational media and computers would be integrated with print materials to ensure comprehension of concepts and to drill when repetitive tasks are necessary.

Is this scenario valid for community college libraries? Do librarians find it acceptable? Would the mostly male administrative echelon of presidents, vice-presidents and academic deans of community colleges give the power and the financial resources to the library, traditionally considered an academic support service and mostly female-directed and staffed?

The experience of this author is that the sexist bias is a covert reality that has impacts on libraries in settings beyond the one described. In addition, funding for libraries in the community college system of Florida has been lean as compared with the availability of support for the state university system. Furthermore, few college librarians have demonstrated the interest and the preparation to deal with developmental education. While librarians in public libraries can claim a big piece of the action as it concerns the adult literacy issue, the college librarian's role remains boxed in by limited resources, high demand for traditional reference, research and bibliographic instruction services. However, the author of this article remains a follower of Louis Shores's "Library-College"⁷ concept and a firm believer in the instructional role of the library with all students, more so with those who lack basic academic skills.

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2. Miami-Dade Community College. Research and Testing Committee. "Research Report on Basic Skills Assessment." Miami, Fla.: M-DCC, Office of Institutional Research, May 1982, p. 3 (internal report).
3. Losak, John. "Research Report No. 84-13: Ethnic Profile, Closing Fall Term 1983-84." Miami, Fla.: M-DCC, Office of Institutional Research, April 1984, p. 7 (internal report).
4. Dr. Gennett left M-DCC in 1981 and is now in the community college system of Amarillo, Texas.
5. Both these handouts were made available by Charles Gonzalez, Chair of the Basic Communication Department and for many years a college-wide leader of programs on behalf of developmental students. Mr. Gonzalez was a member of Dr. Gennett's team.
6. For a description of this curriculum see: Lukenbill, Jeffrey, and McCabe, Robert H. *General Education in a Changing Society*. Dubuque, Ia: Kendall Hunt, 1978.
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