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2014

### Razing the Bar: Developmental Students Shattering Expectations in a First-Year Learning Community

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# Razing the Bar: Developmental Students Shattering Expectations in a First-Year Learning Community

> Cheryl Hogue Smith and Maya Jiménez

By understanding how fear of failure can help motivate students, instructors can make choices in their classes that will lead students toward becoming effective learners.

Over the last few years, we have witnessed a sea change on our campus: Recent waves of entering students seem increasingly out of touch with what it takes to be successful in college. They appear to be less and less prepared for academic work—not necessarily in skill level or ability because our students are still perfectly capable of succeeding in college—but in their attitude toward learning. Our suspicion is that recent cohorts of entering students have had their entire educational experience in the policy environment of No Child Left Behind, which means that most of their “learning”—particularly in the “basics” of reading and writing—has been more about test prep than actual learning, or, as one student in Rebecca D. Cox’s study put it, “high school it’s not really about academics” (24).<sup>1</sup> Of course, some students might seem ready for college, if we are inclined to trust the evidence of placement tests,<sup>2</sup> but that appearance of readiness could be merely evidence of having been taught some superficial features of college writing, like how to write a five-paragraph essay. In our eyes, the real problem is that our entering students don’t really understand how reading and writing are methods of *thinking* and, therefore, of *learning*, and this lack of understanding on their part is what obstructs their capacity or motivation to succeed or gives them the wrong idea of what constitutes academic success.

We teach at Kingsborough Community College (KCC) of the City University of New York (CUNY) in the Opening Doors Learning Community (ODLC) program,<sup>3</sup> which combines a cohort of entering first-year students into a LC (or “link”) composed of an English composition class, a general education class, and a student development class—a crucial course in study skills and orientation to college learning, where the instructor also serves as the student’s adviser or case manager for one academic year. Smith teaches the English classes, while Jiménez teaches survey courses in art history. Our students typically mirror the very diverse urban population of Brooklyn and are full-time students, yet they often work full-time

or at least several hours part-time, traveling between one and two hours one way by public transportation. And they freely opt to take classes in our LC.

We teach two LCs every semester, where the students meet for a total of eight hours per week in all three classes (four in developmental English/first-year composition, three in art history, and one in student development). Sometimes we have taught two sets of developmental students, and other times we have taught two sets of first-year composition students. Twice, however, we have had one set of each, during which time we noticed that the developmental students were maturing into successful learners—so much so, in fact, that they seemed to *outperform* their fellow first-year composition peers in the art history class, where course goals and standards are the same regardless of student ability or level. We started to wonder why this was so: Were the developmental students who placed in non-credit-bearing “remedial” courses trying extra hard to succeed in order to escape the stigma of being in such a class? Moreover, if developmental students *were* trying harder to succeed in their classes, did that attempt help them to become better learners? And, finally, since the first-year composition students placed directly into a “college-level” writing class, did being told that they were “college-ready” adversely affect their learning? These are the questions that led us to some rather unexpected answers.

### **Degenerates, Thieves, and Forgers!**

Before we discuss the performance of our students, we should first explain more about our LC. In general, KCC’s LCs are built around the notion of shared curriculum and integrative assignments. Specifically, for our link, from the 27,000-year time frame that students would be covering in art history, we chose the 1930s–1940s and focused our shared curriculum and assignments on the role that art played during World War II. We created a theme for our students—“Degenerates, Thieves, and Forgers!”—selecting texts that would help students explore the topics of art theft, forgery, and modern art (specifically, “degenerate art” as described by Hitler), all in the context of the early twentieth century. Our courses are fully integrated from the first day to the last.

We should note that the developmental students in our link were technically developmental “writing” students—not developmental “reading” students—because they all “passed” the CUNY-wide placement exam in reading, but not in writing. However, as any college instructor knows, practically all entering students need instruction in how to read critically and productively those texts we assign in college classes. In fact, Sugie Goen and Helen Gillotte-Tropp (91) and Patrick Sullivan (233) explain that problems students encounter in writing most often stem from their inability to read effectively. When we considered the texts we would teach, we kept in mind that students are more engaged in learning when instructors challenge their thinking, as years of research have shown (Zepke and Leach 171–72). So to help our students engage with the materials for our courses, we chose demanding written texts and artworks and created equally demanding writing assignments that required students to make a series of complex rhetorical moves to successfully

execute the assignment. Two of the three papers students wrote in English would also count in art history and required students to use not only what they learned in art history class and from the required museum trips, namely the skills of how to look at, describe, and analyze art, but also what they learned from written texts in English in order to apply that knowledge to a visual text. For the first shared paper, we asked students to explain why a Futurist painting from the Museum of Modern Art would have been considered for the Degenerate Art Exhibition in 1937 in Munich. To write this paper, students used written sources to both define the term *degenerate art* and justify their classification of the painting. For the second shared paper, we asked students to explain why Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goering coveted Johannes Vermeer's paintings. To complete this paper, students synthesized multiple sources that discussed Hitler, Goering, and Vermeer and then used their own experiences with a Vermeer painting that they saw in the Metropolitan Museum of Art to illustrate why they believed Hitler and Goering would have wanted *that* painting over any other in the museum. To grade these papers, Smith evaluated how well the students executed the entire assignment, and Jiménez considered only how well the students described and analyzed the artworks.

Smith taught the exact same texts in both English classes using the same reading and writing strategies, and Jiménez constantly reinforced these texts in art history. Consequently, our students had virtually the same experiences in their linked classes. Yet we found ourselves making observations like the following: “The developmental students seem to be much more engaged in class,” or “Many of the freshman composition students seem so apathetic about their education.” We were teaching the same curriculum with the same methods, yet we constantly found ourselves trying to discover ways that would engage the first-year composition students in our classes. It wasn't until after the second semester of teaching the two different sets of students that we decided to look back and measure student outcomes to see how the developmental students were performing in relation to the first-year composition students.

### **Comparing Outcomes: Results**

To turn our informal observations into a more formal study, we employed six assessment instruments that would measure and compare the performance of the two different groups of students in the art history class—quizzes, midterm papers, midterm exams, final papers, final exams, and final grades. Because the standards in art history are the same regardless of student placement classification, comparing student performances in this general education course would be a more reliable measure of students' success than comparing their grades in English, where the standards between levels are slightly different. We only compared students who actually completed the course.

Examining our data at the end of the first semester, we found that the thirteen developmental students who completed the course outperformed the nineteen first-year composition students who completed the course on four of the

six assessment measures: The developmental students scored an average 8.7 percent higher on quizzes, 7.5 percent higher on the midterm exam, 7.1 percent higher on the final exam, and 12.2 percent higher on their final course grades. The two measurements on which the developmental students did not score higher than the first-year composition students were the midterm paper, where the first-year composition students scored 1.8 percent higher, and on the final paper, where the first-year composition students scored 3.7 percent higher. (See Table 1.) Incidentally, for this semester, none of the developmental students earned below a C- for their final grades in art history, while 37 percent of the first-year composition students earned below a C-, the minimum grade required for a student to transfer the course credit into a senior college.

One year later, we again had two LCs with two different levels of English. For this semester, when we compared their performance in art history, we found that the seventeen developmental students who completed the course did not outperform the sixteen first-year composition students who completed the course on four of the six assessments—the midterm paper, midterm exam, final paper, and final exam—which might, upon first glance, seem to contradict our claims. In this particular semester, the first-year composition students earned an average 3.3 percent higher on the midterm paper, 6 percent higher on the midterm exam, 4.6 percent higher on the final paper, and 1 percent higher on the final exam. However, the developmental students earned an average of 3.2 percent higher than their first-year composition counterparts on the sixth assessment measure—their final course grades. Both classes had virtually the same quiz grades. (See Table 2.)

### Discussion of Results: Earned Knowledge

Looking at the six assessment instruments for both semesters, we were not surprised to find that the first-year composition students scored slightly higher on their papers, given they were more likely to be better at conveying their thinking through their writing, which is presumably why they placed directly into first-year composition in the first place. (See endnote 2.) We were also not surprised to see

**TABLE 1: Semester I Comparison of Developmental and First-Year Student Performance, Percentage Higher on Six Assessment Instruments\***

Class	Quizzes	Midterm Papers	Midterm Exams	Final Papers	Final Exams	Final Grades
Dev Eng	8.7		7.5		7.1	12.2
First-Year Comp (n=19)		1.8 (n=14)		3.7 (n=15)	(n=17)	

\*Exams and papers not taken or completed were not factored into the percentages.

**TABLE 2: Semester 2 Comparison of Developmental and First-Year Student Performance, Percentage Higher on Six Assessment Instruments\***

Class	Quizzes	Midterm Papers	Midterm Exams	Final Papers	Final Exams	Final Grades
Dev Eng (n=17)	.02			(n=16)	(n=16)	3.2
First-Year Comp (n=16)		3.3 (n=13)	6.0 (n=15)	4.6 (n=12)	1.0 (n=15)	

\*Exams and papers not taken or completed were not factored into the percentages.

that the developmental students outperformed the first-year composition students on the final course grades. We expected this result because we noticed the difference after we recorded the grades, but also because the developmental students were more attentive to attendance, quizzes, homework, and class participation—all of which accounted for a minor percentage of their grade, but which had a significant impact on their learning. Ultimately, because they attended class more frequently, the developmental students seemed to benefit from more class instruction, and rarely, if ever, did they miss assignments. In the second semester, even though the developmental students did not outperform the freshman composition students on most measures, once the stellar class participation and homework grades for the developmental students were factored in to their final grades, they were able to surpass the first-year composition students on that measure. We also noticed that as the semester progressed, from the time of the midterm to the final, the variance in percentage between these two sets of students decreased from 6 percent to 1 percent, which indicates the developmental students were catching up to the first-year composition students in their performance in art history. On the basis of these last data, we are inclined to offer two plausible conjectures: one, that all the students were making forward trajectories through the art history course, with the developmental students making larger strides, or two, that the first-year composition students remained stagnant while the developmental students simply caught up. Either way, the decrease in variance from 6 percentage points to 1 shows great improvement on the part of the developmental students. Regardless of which may be true, we were brought back to our initial questions of why the developmental students virtually outperformed their first-year composition counterparts, and we believe the answer is because, overall, the developmental students discovered what it meant to learn, while most of the first-year composition students were simply doing school as they had in the past.

In a longitudinal study that focused on first-year writing in college, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz conclude that “the story of the freshman year is not one of dramatic changes on paper; it is the story of changes within the writers

themselves” (124). Sommers and Saltz discuss how successful students in first-year writing courses learned to put the focus on the process of writing instead of the writing task/grade. They explain, “Students who continue to see writing as a matter of mechanics or as a series of isolated exercises tend never to see the ways writing can serve them as a medium in which to explore their own interests. They continue to rely on their high school idea that academic success is reflected in good grades” (140). This notion is, of course, true with all disciplines; students who focus solely on grades often view course material as a set of “isolated exercises” rather than as an intellectual endeavor. The process of learning helps students discover ideas and make sense of thinking that will become increasingly more complex as they move deeper into their major fields of study.

What tended to separate our developmental students from our first-year composition students is that during class and on museum visits, the developmental students were animatedly engaged in discussions and group work and wanted to discover ideas and make sense of their thinking as they moved deeper into increasingly more complex texts and assignments. In addition, during student presentations in art history, the developmental students were more excited and knowledgeable about the artwork on which they were presenting, oftentimes expanding their research beyond the textbook, while the first-year composition students fulfilled the assignment, but in such an apathetic and perfunctory manner that their presentations tended to be less engaging and informative, oftentimes relying solely on the textbook as a source of research and reciting the information almost verbatim. Furthermore, the developmental students understood that their papers and exams were evidence of their thinking and not products of disconnected assessments. They recognized that art history requires thought and analysis, and because they let themselves *experience* the art they were asked to examine, they thought more critically and creatively about the images. As a result, they were more impressed by what they saw, and they pushed themselves to demonstrate how written texts informed their understanding and analyses of artworks.

Still, the developmental students’ grades on their papers weren’t as high as the grades on the first-year composition students’ papers, but we feel those grades are deceptive. Mike Rose argues, “As writers move further away from familiar ways of expressing themselves, the strains on their cognitive and linguistic resources increase, and the number of mechanical and grammatical errors they make shoots up” (188–89). We know most of the developmental students were engaging more analytically with the written texts and artworks because their in-class and small group discussions were more rich and nuanced than were the discussions of their first-year composition counterparts, which tended to focus on the surface-level meaning—the gist—of the texts. The conversations the developmental students were having almost certainly “strained” their “cognitive and linguistic resources,” undoubtedly leading to “botched performances” (54) on their essays that, to some extent, account for the lower paper grades. For the art history portion of the students’ papers, Jiménez always tried to give “credit for the sentence [students] intended to write” (Bartholomae 254). Yet we have to admit that sometimes students are thinking at such

high levels that not only do they produce infelicitous prose, but they also struggle to reveal the logical connections that would otherwise demonstrate their complex thinking about the art. That our students were thinking analytically about the art was clear in their discussions, but their struggle to convey their thoughts through their writing led to gaps and surface-level errors that unfortunately contributed to lower grades, even when taking into account some of what they “intended to write.” Certainly some first-year composition students were experiencing the same phenomenon of “botching” their writing performance (which is, ironically, something we prefer from students so that we would know they were thinking). But most first-year composition students played it safe and took very few risks in their thinking or their writing and produced texts that fulfilled the key elements of the assignments in prose that demonstrated little cognitive and linguistic strain, yet still resulted in a higher grade.

Several first-year composition students did, to their credit, embrace the larger lessons about learning that we were teaching, suggesting they also tried just as hard as many of the developmental students. But most of the first-year composition students seemed indifferent toward learning in general, focusing on their grades or the outcome of the course, rather than on the course itself, which Cox’s study verifies is a major concern with community college students (75). Because of this, many first-year composition students looked to gain the basic information about art history so that it could be memorized and then regurgitated, which for some allowed them to successfully answer questions and write papers that met the basic requirements—particularly in regard to the art history midterm and final exams, both of which had a significant multiple-choice component. Sheridan Blau argues that this passive kind of “learning” leads to false knowledge that is no better than hearsay—that is, knowledge that belongs to someone else and not the learner at all. For the learner, they’re just words to repeat. Blau argues that this kind of knowledge is not true knowledge, but false knowledge, because true knowledge is something earned. When Blau applies this principle to the teaching and learning of literature, he says that the way to earn true literary knowledge is through the experience of reading texts, which includes such processes as questioning texts, identifying the problems in texts, and having the capacity (and we would add motivation) to work through those problems—even when, or especially when, those problems lead to confusion and more questions (3–5). Most of our developmental students were motivated to push through their confusion in order to earn their knowledge, while most of the first-year composition students simply wanted knowledge handed to them in both English and art history in order to receive a “good” grade.

We are not in any way implying that the first-year composition students were “bad” students, just students who tended to see themselves as repositories of information instead of active participants in their own learning. This fundamental difference in learning attitudes invites the questions, then, as to how and why the developmental students progressed into the type of successful learners that would allow them to often outperform the more “prepared” students, since the two levels had virtually the same curriculum in all their classes. Why would one level con-



sistently be more motivated to learn? The answer, we have come to believe, was because of us.

### **Cheerleaders versus Prophets of Doom**

Thomas Bailey argues that there is a “blurring of the distinction between developmental and ‘college-level’ students” in that the students at the high-end of the developmental and low end of the “college-level” spectrums are virtually interchangeable (1). Like Bailey, we too have found that when they first enter college, both sets of students have similar academic skills and mindsets of what it means to be successful students. However, the way we approached teaching the two sets of students was different. Because the developmental students often experience the feelings of inferiority and imminent failure that scholars like Mina Shaughnessy and Mike Rose brought to our attention so many years ago, we automatically assumed this of our developmental students and geared our teaching toward allaying their fears. Incidentally, one added pressure for KCC’s developmental students is that in order for them to move beyond the often-stigmatized “remedial” class, they must retake and “pass” the CUNY-wide writing placement exam to move into first-year composition. We knew that this requirement hung over their heads all semester and magnified their fear of failure. Yet this added pressure in the developmental class also hung over *us* and constantly inspired us to act as their cheerleaders, endlessly rooting for our “players” and always letting them know that we believed in their ability to succeed—even if they didn’t always. (The students are the ones who started calling us their “cheerleaders,” which happens almost every semester we have taught developmental students.) But for the first-year composition students, our approach was to teach them to take responsibility for their own learning by making smart choices—such as being prepared for class, completing all work on time—and accepting the blame when they didn’t. At the same time, we consistently let them know that we believed they were capable of mastering the work, but we never really went so far as to act like “cheerleaders” for this group because it never occurred to us that they may have had a similar fear of failure in college—a point expertly argued in Cox’s *College Fear Factor*. In hindsight, we *do* see that many of our first-year composition students were fearful of failure, and while this may seem obvious to other instructors of first-year composition students, it was not obvious to us.

One of our original research questions was whether or not first-year composition students were adversely affected by being told they were “college-ready,” but maybe the question should have been whether or not their testing into a “college-ready” class adversely affected our approach to teaching them. For our first-year composition students, we were compassionate but demanding professors who, instead of helping to alleviate their fears, were perhaps contributing to them. In our eyes, we were providing a version of “tough love” so they could develop into successful, life-long learners. Looking back, we can see that they may have mistaken this “love” for unsympathetic demands from “pompous-ass professor[s]” who, in their eyes, were expecting ivy-league performance from community college students (Cox 26). Our motives were to help our students understand that

future professors would have high expectations for college-level work from them, but we did not fully realize that we may have contributed to the disconnect some students felt between themselves and us, their professors—and, therefore, between themselves and learning (Cox). We thought that if we repeated the message that they were responsible for their own learning, they would become more motivated to engage with our curriculum. In reality, by compelling the first-year composition students to take ownership of their own learning and academic performance, we may have inadvertently put too great an emphasis on the end product and grade and actually deterred these students from developing into successful students and learners. If we had acted as cheerleaders for our first-year composition students, we may have been able to help alleviate their fears so they would have been more motivated to learn. But instead of acting as their cheerleaders, we unwittingly acted as prophets of doom.

### **A Quadripolar Model of Student Motivation**

To better understand how fear may affect our students' academic achievement, we turned to the research of Krista De Castella, Don Byrne, and Martin Covington, whose recent work looks at how students' fear of failure and success orientation—depicted “by their motivation, resilience, and enthusiasm for learning” (861)—might affect their overall motivation in school. Building on fifty years of motivation research, De Castella, Byrne, and Covington adapted a “quadripolar model of achievement and predictions” for behaviors of students. Essentially, this model determines how students' fear of failure and success orientation might classify them into four categories—optimists, overstrivers, self-protectors, and failure acceptors—that could then predict how they would perform in school. We believe this model sheds light upon the differences of our developmental and first-year composition students. (See Figure 1.)



*Optimists* have a low fear of failure and high success orientation and “are categorized by their self-confidence, resiliency, proactive orientation to tasks, and exemplary achievement behaviors” (De Castella, Byrne, and Covington 863). These are students who understand what it means to learn and who are willing to push themselves in order to earn knowledge. Optimists are who we hope our students are or can become. The opposite of optimists are *failure acceptors*, who have both low fear of failure and success orientation and “are typically distinguished by their apparent indifference to academic tasks and their overall disengagement from school” (864). These are the students who disappear from our classes—whether physically or intellectually—for reasons we often never learn about. For the purposes of our discussion, we will focus on the remaining categories—*overstrivers* and *self-protectors*—because we believe these categories best fit the students who completed our courses.

*Overstrivers* have a high fear of failure and high success orientation, but their fear of failure actually acts as a motivator to succeed. In trying to prevent failure, overstrivers push themselves to “resolve their lack of confidence in their abilities,” which results in “a hybrid quality of hope and fear that drives their accomplishments” (De Castella, Byrne, and Covington 864). Because overstrivers want to succeed, they use their fear of failure to work hard on academic tasks instead of falling victim to those fears (874). Our developmental students seemed to typify the overstriver mold. First of all, by virtue of being in Smith’s class, they already “failed.” Therefore, to prevent further “failure,” they seemed to “channel their fears” (864) into diligently working to escape the class. This is especially true when it came to analyzing the complex texts we assigned. The developmental students embraced the theory that in order to advance their writing/thinking abilities, they needed to read college-level texts differently. In both the developmental and first-year composition English classes, for each reading and artwork, we asked students to hold conversations in small groups as they moved through a series of worksheets that would help them learn to make intertextual connections, find subtleties in texts, listen and react to metacognitive whispers, engage emotionally with a text, read with multiple purposes, understand multiple interpretations, and find and fill gaps.<sup>4</sup> The developmental students fed off each other’s energy and individual experiences with the texts, and when they engaged with the assignment and with each other, they began working through the difficulty of the texts in order to make sense of those texts in relation to the assignment they would be writing. Since the developmental students realized early the difficulty of the readings and artworks, they willingly worked together to help each other learn. In fact, several students commented about how the worksheets made the readings “less scary” because they had a chance to break down and discuss the readings and artworks with their fellow students. By recognizing the value in doing so, they were motivated to read ahead of time so they could participate more effectively in the group discussions. In contrast, most of the first-year composition students resisted the notion that they needed to learn to strengthen their reading skills in order to be college-level readers, and that resistance often led to superficial readings of the written texts in English and visual texts in art history. Many first-year composition students treated the reading

workshops as they did the student presentations in art history—something to get through rather than learn from—which may explain why they later struggled with the complexities of the reading and writing assignments when left to figure them out on their own, even if they were able to write a decent (but pedantic) art history portion of their papers. In short, our first-year composition students seemed to employ self-handicapping habits that led them to embody De Castella, Byrne, and Covington’s self-protector pattern.

*Self-protectors* have a high fear of failure and low success orientation, and they “are primarily motivated by fears of failure over and above their ambitions for success” (De Castella, Byrne, and Covington 864). Self-protectors lower their expectations for success so that if they do fail, it won’t feel like that much of a failure. In other words, “By feigning carelessness and not studying, for example, these students can attribute poor performance to lack of effort rather than lack of ability” (864). De Castella, Byrne, and Covington believe that because students find ways to “deflect the causes of failure away from their ability and consequence of self-worth,” they are “particularly vulnerable to self-handicapping” strategies that “often bring about the failure students are trying to avoid” (862). These authors explain that behaviors such as “task avoidance, denial, deliberately withholding effort, procrastination, lack of practice, reporting illness or other symptoms” (862) describe self-handicapping, and many of our first-year composition students exhibited several of these behaviors. Even though they cared tremendously about their grades, most appeared to be apathetic toward learning, as was demonstrated by their lack of homework, chronic lateness or absences, and poor class participation (all habits that Jasmine Green et al. describe as contributors to lack of engagement [1112]). They recognized the difficulty of the texts and assignments, but they still didn’t appear to take seriously the effort that was required to execute the writing assignments—including reading before class the texts they would discuss in class. Now, after looking back, we can hear our first-year composition students’ murmurings about the complexity of our curriculum, something that should have alerted us to the notion that they were fearful of not succeeding. We have to accept that our first-year composition students were just as fearful of the readings and assignments as were the developmental students and that they were, in effect, self-handicapping themselves and adopting the self-protector role. Knowing this, we can move forward with the same attention to their needs that we have always given the developmental students. We must help them to reject self-handicapping strategies as a way of dealing with their fear and instead help them to adopt a high success orientation. Then they will have a clearer path to becoming optimists.

## **Razing the Bar**

By setting out to discover why our developmental students often outperformed their first-year composition counterparts, we learned that the developmental students were developing into *learners* (and hopefully optimists) to some extent because of their tendency to be overstrivers. We also learned, much to our dismay, that our

first-year composition students might have adopted self-handicapping strategies because we were inadvertently creating classroom environments that elevated their fear of failure. Our curriculum is extremely complex and difficult, yet the developmental students tackle it with passion and enthusiasm. We did little to alleviate the first-year composition students' fear that they would not be able to manage our curriculum—much less master it—and instead attributed their lack of homework, chronic tardiness/absences, and poor class participation to an inability to make wise choices. And we told them so in a stronger breath than when we told them they had the capacity to succeed.

We recognize that our small study brings to mind questions that need further exploration. For example, how can the quadripolar model help teachers tailor their curriculum and instruction in order to help students get past their fear of failure? In what ways can instructors help alleviate students' fears without taking on the burden of their students' motivation? And, of course, how can we help our students develop into optimists for future academic tasks?

We will continue to teach identical texts to these two different levels of students, and we will continue to make sure that those texts are difficult enough to tax their abilities to think. From now on, though, we will become the cheerleaders our first-year composition students need us to be so we can help them avoid self-handicapping strategies that are self-defeating. We will cheer them on to make the same constructive choices as do their developmental brethren, who so willingly struggle through the processes that will help them tackle future complex reading/writing/thinking tasks—undergoing the kind of effort that will help them earn true knowledge (Blau). Ultimately, we raised the bar high for both the developmental and first-year composition students, and while many composition students may have reached that bar, comparatively, most developmental students razed it. Now, it's time for the first-year composition students to do the same. ◀

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Stephanie Akunvabey, assistant director of academic affairs and student development instructor/adviser, for our links; Marissa Schlesinger, director of academic affairs; and Christian Calienes Deza, associate director of instructional research, for their invaluable input and advice regarding LCs in general and our students in particular. And we, of course, want to thank all our students who have been so willing to learn about degenerates, thieves, and forgers.

## Notes

1. We are in no way criticizing elementary or secondary teachers whose jobs have been made extraordinarily difficult by the testing regimen forced upon them by NCLB.

2. For this article, we could certainly argue about the accuracy of English placement tests, but we are taking a different line of inquiry: we want to examine the attitudes toward learning that both developmental and first-year composition students have—despite placement. So, while the debate about the usefulness of placement tests is certainly an important one—and one that we will undoubtedly provoke—so, too, is the conversation about how to help motivate our students to want to learn, regardless of where they place or why. And that is the discussion we take up here.

3. For more about the KCC's LC models, please see either of the two MDRC reports that are listed in the Works Cited (Sommo et al.; Visher et al.).

4. See Smith for more about the pedagogy and success of these worksheets.

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