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A Letter from the President

I Want You to Know

In the past few years, a swarm of reforms has swept the country in developmental education which for the purposes of this letter I am defining as below-college-level courses: multiple measures, accelerated courses, self-placement, mathways, emporium, ALP, NCBO, and you can probably name a few more. Although many show positive results, there have been no longitudinal studies because the reforms are too new; however, there have never been longitudinal studies of a comprehensive nature in our field because there is a lack of research in developmental education. So, reforms look good for a few years, and we proclaim them “the answer” which they may or not be.

The Pendulum Swings

For those of you who have been in teaching long enough, you have seen the pendulum swing back and forth and back and forth. As I travel and discuss different reforms with faculty, the one sentiment I hear from veteran teachers is,

“Wait long enough, and this, too, shall pass.” They are right. For those of you who have been in K-12 education, you really know about this phenomenon: tracking, mastery learning, mainstreaming, performance-based funding, career ladders, and on and on.

So, what are we, as dedicated, caring professional educators supposed to do? Keep on being just that. Reforms may come and go, but there is nothing that will ever replace teachers who are invested in their students. And from the past few years of meeting thousands of practitioners from around the country, I say with confidence that there is no one who is actually in the classroom working with students who does not work the extra hour, does not think about students after work with care and concern, does not do all they can to ensure student success both academic and in life. I read about teachers who post “Teacher win of the day: A Student told me she had always hated math until she came to my course, and now she wants to help tutor!” or “I have taken every class you teach. You truly changed my life.”

“You truly changed my life.”

This is repeated again and again in every community college and developmental education class in this country. Researchers may not be able to measure it, but we know we change lives. We know we help that single mom or dad stay in school or if they do leave, we make sure they know they can always come back. We celebrate at graduation whether it is at 3 years or 8 years, and although that may not “look good in the data,” it feels great in our hearts.

I am all for reforms. Requiring teachers to be educated was a reform back in the day, and I still think that was a good idea! However, what should never be lost in the deluge of reform is the importance of the human touch which is more potent than any structural improvement imaginable.

I am hoping you have a great semester, and I hope to see you in National Harbor next month. Early registration ends January 31; please register using the link button below.

Robin

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