**Presentation for CADE San Diego**

**Title:** Responses and Reflections from Students in an Accelerated Learning Program

**Activity:** Using an index card provided please write down how you would define reflective writing as it exists in your class. In other words, what does reflective writing look like for you in your class?

Teaching “developmental” or “non-credit bearing” writing at the two-year college has been fraught with challenges related to student success and appropriate support. And in recent years many colleges face cuts to remedial programs. While some states have opted to eliminate “remediation” programs, others have developed unique approaches to working with students who need support to succeed in college level courses. In 2007 at the Community College of Baltimore County Dr. Peter Adams set out a plan to redefine the field of traditional “developmental” writing by creating an ALP model that incorporated mainstream education alongside a co-requisite course pairing. An ALP/Co-Requisite course is designed so that students who place into traditional remediation or developmental writing are offered the opportunity to take Freshman Composition or First Year Writing in addition to a secondary course that offers embedded support. Both courses are taught by the same instructor and are back-to-back. Traditionally the second course is taught in a computer lab so that students can work on their writing. There are 8 features that CCBC’s ALP has identified that are beneficial:

1. ALP students are mainstreamed into ENGL 101 for which they can receive college credit.
2. ALP students are part of a cohort of eight students and one instructor who spend six hours a week together.
3. ENGL 101 serves as a meaningful context for what they are learning in the developmental course.
4. Class size is just eight changing the instructional environment.
5. The pipeline through which they must travel is shortened from two semesters to one.
6. In the ENGL 101 class, ALP students work with students who are stronger writers and can serve as role models.
7. ALP instructors consciously pay attention to helping ALP students develop successful student behaviors.
8. ALP instructors consciously pay attention to issues from outside the college that may have a negative impact on ALP students.

I was struck by the last two features and later on will discuss how I integrated an examination of behaviors and consciousness into my ALP course. But the thinking behind this course pairing is that if students develop a relationship with their peers and their instructor they will bond to an institution and furthermore, that because of smaller class size students receive more specific attention geared towards their individual needs which will help them develop as writers, readers, and critical thinkers. ALPs and Co-Requisite courses have not only been successful nationwide but have become a kind of social movement that has created a conversation about the kinds of instruction at-risk students need and have shed light on the difficulties that faculty face when working with this unprepared population. While the original ALP model has changed over time its basic tenets and mission are the same; it is designed to help at-risk students succeed through their writing courses so that students may persist in their educational goals.

To create the best opportunity for students at the college where I teach, Suffolk County Community College we implemented an ALP pilot in 2015. Suffolk County Community College strategically locates itself in three different areas on Long Island in Suffolk County. The westerly Grant campus is located in Brentwood and is home to a large Latino-American community and accommodates 9,000 students. The Eastern campus caters to 4,000 students and is located in the town of Riverhead making it the smallest, but quaintest campus. The largest and what is considered to be the main academic site, the Ammerman campus is situated in Selden New York where there the population is mostly a mix of white, African American, and Latino-American students. The Ammerman campus, which was the first to open its doors, enrolls approximately 14,000 students in a given year (Suffolk County Community College). Because of the diverse demographics on each of these campuses, we act somewhat independently.

A quick note about placement: for about the last twenty plus years SCCC-college wide had used Accuplacer’s Sentence level exam as the benchmark for placing students. In 2010 I began to question the Accuplacer’s value for placement at my institution. I took the exam several times and afterward felt that it was a poor representation of our pedagogy in the classroom and furthermore was not in line with our expectations as teachers of writing. In 2017 I made a push to move towards a guided placement approach wherein incoming freshman or new students would have all writing course options explained to them and they would make a decision for themselves about where they felt they belonged. I was promptly shut down by my department and administration and soon after in 2018 our college administration began to shop around the new Writeplacer placement exam. As of now we utilize Writeplacer to determine the course that students are placed in. Our writing sequence offers a menu of courses for students depending on their placement score: ENG 09 Basic Writing (3 empty credits); ENG 010 Stand along Developmental Writing (3 empty credits) ENG 011 (4credits) which is a combination of students who place into ENG 09 and ENG 010. ENG 012 Emerging Writers Workshop which is an ALP/Co-Requisite course that is paired with an ENG 101 Freshman Composition course and then we have a stand along ENG 101 Freshman Comp; lastly ENG 102 is considered a writing course but is an Introduction to Literature and literary analysis course. I recently completed a course adoption for a course entitled ENG 100 Enhanced Composition which is the equivalent of a Freshman Composition/FYW course but has an extended course time and a smaller class size.

This is all new; back in 2014 we were like many other institutions. At Suffolk County Community College, we noticed a consistent percentage of students placing into ENG 010 developmental writing. {In the fall 2015 semester 33.4% of students placed into ENG 010 developmental writing (enrollment 23,670 at the college).} We began to follow student trajectory if they took a stand along developmental course and we found that we were losing a significant number of students (In 2012 we examined a sample size of ENG 010 students and we found that only18% of the cohort that started were still enrolled at the college.) Changes need to be made.

After a two-year pilot which started in the spring of 2015 I worked to implement an Accelerated Learning Program model on the Ammerman campus at Suffolk County Community College. Through our college curriculum process, I set out to design curricula that would help our at-risk students, but I struggled through curricula development. I really wanted to get at why students struggled with writing…a pretty big question which of course many of us have been working to answer. But ALP/Co-Req classes are different; they’re intense; they build relationships; we all get to know one another, and I wondered if that could have a deeper impact than I initially thought? I started to wonder what impact two writing classes had on students’ self-reflective perception of writing? From 2015 until now I have been examining student responses to learn more about their perceptions of themselves and their relationship to writing. To do this I began to design low and high stakes assignments that would offer students an opportunity to write about how they perceive themselves as students and writers.

**TAKE A BREAK AND LOOK AT SLIDE 9 & 10> SHARE RESPONSES**

Each reflective assignment asked students to examine three aspects of their writing or work as college student. The first assignment I titled a **“Studentship Reflective essay”.** **And I’ve circulated copies of each of these assignments.** I developed two components for each of these assignments so that students initially examine their past experiences; whether this in high school or writing courses they’ve taken in previous semesters at our college or another academic institution. I want them to capture or think about their past experiences with writing and their academics. This essay encourages students to critically reflect which I define as a deliberate process when a writer takes time, within the course of their work, to focus on their performance and think carefully about the thinking that led to particular actions. I ask students to stop and question what they are learning from in order to inform what they might do in the future. I focus them specifically on unhealthy behaviors that may get in the way of their academic success. Throughout their thought process I ask them to write about these unhealthy and positive behaviors in order to examine issues that come up for them individually.The second reflective assignment I ask them to write about is **“Revision Reflection”. (ENG 101 Assessment outcome showed students weren’t meeting our expectations for revision).** We discuss how revisionpractices for individual writers may look different depending on what a writer chooses to focus in on. I then ask students to consider how as writers they work to reimagine their essay(s) which can result in holistic changes to writing. I emphasize that in some cases, this may mean that as students they are taking some risks to alter the content, reorganize the material, or work to strengthen the coherence of ideas. As we all know in the revision process this might mean that writers/students will add or cut material if it works to clarify the overall purpose of their writing. I have found that students struggle the most with examining their revision skills prior to coming to college, but more on this and their responses that led me to that opinion in a moment. The last low stakes reflective assignment I ask my ALP students to complete is a **“Research Reflection”.** Depending on the school district the student comes from (Long Island has 125 School Districts; Suffolk County aprox. 69) they may or may not have taken a junior or senior English class and even if they did they may or may not have been required to write an essay or write a research essay for that matter. Therefore, the research paper is a college wide learning objective that each professor must ask students to complete. Again after a college wide assessment we became extremely concerned with students research skills and several years ago received a grant funded project to design mini web based tutorials that would help strengthen student’s skills. The Virtual Learning Commons are accessible to each students in order to meet the needs they may have with their writing course **(MAYBE SHOW A VIDEO).** As students are working on their ENG 101/Freshman Composition research paper they are also reflecting on their process. Again, initially I ask students to think back to the kinds of research (if any) that they may have engaged in prior to coming to college. Then throughout the semester in our ALP class we examine what research is and why writers do it. We write and discuss the kinds of tasks or inquiries that writers must make to gather outside information. Ultimately, the goal of this research reflection is for students to understand how valuable research writing can be in their lives. In other words, I want students to be less fearful, have less anxiety, or have less angst when it comes to research writing. As I implemented these three core reflective assignments and as I read student responses, I began to realize how valuable and telling our students’ reflective perceptions of writing can be. In my examination of student responses to these reflective pieces I have learned a lot about myself and my own philosophies as I approach student writing.

Categorically student responses, while somewhat shocking, also confirmed what I had been hypothesizing. Not only were students struggling to figure out their writing and academic past, but they were wrestling with it as it helped or hinder their college experiences. As I read through student responses know that I have altered names and most definitely sought out and gained IRB approval for the reflections I’m going to share with you.

In the **Studentship reflection responses**: I’m going to quote some words and phrases students used to describe behaviors that sometimes got in the way of their success: “I lacked preparation” (Kyle), “never stuck to due dates” (Mary), “I never gave myself enough credit” (Jessica), “I’m a big-time procrastinator” (Kyle, Jackie, Betty, ), “I was lazy and unmotivated” (Patrise), “I have terrible habits when it comes to studying” (Betty), “I’m texting and on my phone too much. I did not try my best. I was careless about my time management. I was not a good planner.” (Farrah).

Students identified **healthy behaviors** that would help them succeed with words or phrases such as: “motivation or self-motivation” (Matt, Time, Patrise, ), “time management” (Matt), “organization” (Tim), “communication with their peers and professor” (Lena and Farrah), “respect” (Molly), “a good student tries to create something new and different. They take notes, manage time, and make a study to plan or solve a problem” (Farrah), “I need to be on time” (Betty), “It’s tough balancing work and school but I’m trying my best” (Jessica), “I learned to study a little bit every night leading up to an assignment or test” (Betty), “Using the campus learning centers helped me a lot. I need that one-on-one.” (Matt), “stay focused on the future” (Molly).

Overall students were very perceptive about the negative behaviors they were engaging in that led to a lack of success. Some of the students made strides to alter these behaviors while others said they were going to work on changing slowly. One student said “I want to do my best to pass my classes and get better at writing. I spend hours writing and thinking of which words are the right ones to put into my papers.” (Molly). While another said “I was always a person who said ‘live in the moment’ but I guess the point of growing up is changing and doing what’s best for me. I want to say my studentship skills have changed and got better but that would be a lie because I just started my college career and I think college puts a lot stress on our lives” (Sally). One very honest writer stated that “In high school I was able to just do the literal bare minimum to just pass and get the hell out of doge. If I could go back I would do all the work I needed to do because maybe I wouldn’t be where I am today” (Mark).

As I examined the **Research Reflections** there were two consistent themes that students articulated in their essays: 1. In high school if students did write a research paper, many did not, they did not have the freedom to select research topics and they were excited and thrilled to have control over what they wrote for their college research assignments. Maggy staged that “I thought research papers were boring and pointless. Like, why would I want to write about an assigned topic and not something I wanted to?”. And Sally stated “In high school the teacher would give out a topic and I would research and type away. I was shocked to find out all the different sources I can use in my writing and I questioned why my teachers didn’t show me this in high school.” Most of them noted that they found research writing interesting and informative. Lena stated, “I personally find writing research papers extremely interesting and I learn about topics I would have never thought to learn about before this class.” And Molly stated “Reading through books and doing research makes me feel like Indiana Jones reading his books trying to find a lost artifact somewhere” and Kyle contextualized research by saying “I also believe academic research is important to my college success because I am realizing that college is not just to get myself a better career, but college is to educate myself about many different topics and to learn as much as I can.” and the second consistent theme was related to time or having enough time to figure out a topic, find sources, and figuring out MLA citations. Jack stated “I honestly didn’t give myself enough time to fully explore and possibly make the essay even better than what I had submitted for grading”. And in Betty’s reflection she stated that “I just get overwhelmed with the amount of research I must do for this kind of essay.”. Overall the consensus was that if students had more time it would relieve their anxiety when working on a research paper.

As I mentioned earlier students had a difficult time responding to the **Revision Reflection** assignment in that they were able to focus only on revision they learned in the ALP/Co-Req. courses they took at Suffolk. But I found this too be a profound moment for many of them in that they realized it was something they hadn’t been taught or at least it was something they couldn’t remember being taught in high school. In almost each essay I reviewed that discussed revision students stated that the only revision they learned in high school that they could remember was sentence level revision. Jerome said, “I used to think that revision only meant finding punctuation or spelling mistakes.” Sam stated, “Revising my papers helped me correct the format, grammar and punctuation.” Matt said “A technique I used in high school was sentence structure. I would revise sentence structure by following the correct grammar rules.” And one more example is from Tim who said “I would usually rework my sentence level. Grammar is where I would get the most points taken away from me. So, when I did go back for revision, I would focus on my grammar.” After taking ENG 012, students noted the differences with the ways they approached revision, and many noted they felt it was a process that led them to rethink their ideas. Natasha stated, “Now when I write I specifically follow three certain revising strategies that help me form a clear introduction/conclusion and I make sure my papers are easy to understand and follow”. And Kyle stated that “Now a days in my college career I am learning that just being able to read your work is one of many revision tactics that should be taken into account. Revision is an important process that ranges from sentence level to global revision. Revision is a process that will allow you to do your best work by bringing you back to your thoughts and getting a brand-new perspective”. These reflective responses showed that student’s who actively understood the writing process used it in a way that was new but helpful for them.

In addition, students also believed that when they were given feedback from their instructor and peers it helped them focus on reworking their essays. Tim stated that “When we would peer revise our partners essay in class; it helped with someone else reading my essay.” Matt agreed and said that “I let my friend or peer read my paper and then I ask them for their feedback. Having an outsider read your paper means a lot because they can tell you to add more details that they as a reader would like to know more about”. And Mary equated revision feedback to critiques; she wrote that “Revision critiques are very helpful; at first I thought it wouldn’t be helpful. Then I realized that they are and not only for the person receiving them but also from the person reviewing the essay. It benefits both since it helps each other’s writing and they can receive feedback from each other’s work.” I sometimes wondered if peer revision was as valuable as I thought it was and multiple student responses confirmed it; I believe now that peer revision in some ways can be just effective as my own direct instruction and revision suggestions.

This past semester I solicited more reflective responses about the co-requisite model itself and there were some very positive responses. Malcom stated that “looking at my schedule on the first day made me very nervous because I thought I would be taking two different English classes, but I soon came to the realization that the 012 course actually helped me succeed in the 101 course. The 012-course opened up my perspective on many ideas.” Another student stated that the 101-class helped because “seeing someone who is a way better writer than me and how they wrote helped me out quite a bit.” (Mark) While we talk a lot about the influence the 101 students have this was the first time I had heard/read a student acknowledging that impact that that kind of engagement had on them. Jane also agreed that the model seemed to work for her; she stated, “My experiences in both 012 and 101 was good and educational. ENG 012 was an extra class that would help me improve my writing more and help in the ENG 101 class. The 101 class was a good experience for me, considering I just finished high school in January and decided to go to college right away. This class was stressful for me because it was something different and I was not ready to enter college so quickly. However the 012 class helped me prepare for the 101 class. This class gave me a boost and helped me with my assignments.” There was also consistent excitement from multiple students being able to move forward with their academic journeys. Adrian said that “the combination of the two classes will allow me to finish ENG 101 this semester and be eligible for ENG 102 next semester even though my writing scores were not up to college level. I’m pretty stoked for the future.” Sheila stated too that “to be honest the idea of giving a student the chance to do both classes together is a really great opportunity that the college is providing students with.” And one of my favorite reflections about the classes is from Ian who said “the experiences for both of the classes were enjoyable and digestible.”

The biggest take away I had from reading through these sample essays was that in most cases students felt they had a better grasp on their writing process after taking our ALP courses. Many of them simply didn’t know what the writing process was. They didn’t realize how useful revision was and that many writers use this approach to sharpen and polish their ideas. Most of the students in this sample claimed they hated writing in the past because they “never saw the purpose or reason for writing” (Jessica). In addition, many of them thought of revision as “fixing my sentences” (Molly). Many of the detailed reflections literally walked me through how they swerved in and out of different stages all the while focusing on audience and purpose.

**Focus Group responses: (Student sample of 84: 7 sections of 12 students)** And to follow up with our ALP students I asked our college’s Institutional Effectiveness team to conduct Focus groups that utilized pre-course survey questions to query responses. While a list of questions was tackled in the focus groups I wanted to focus on student responses to two of them:

1. How would you describe the experiences you had in previous writing/English classes:
2. The experiences I had in my ENG 012 Emerging Writers Workshop class this semester were:

When students discussed past experiences with writing/English classes they had, many of them said the “teacher was boring” and that they had little control over what they could write. One respondent said “In high school it was like read this, answer this question. I don’t think they prepared us for college in high school. I wrote one paper in my senior year of high school. So that would not have compared with the college English I’m taking now.” Another respondent said, “I don’t think the high school system works; it’s all about testing and grades. Then there’s the textbook it’s memorization short term and then forget it. Unlike college it’s about expanding your mind; learning how to write better and getting into the material.” When students reflected on their experiences in the ENG 012/ALP/Co-Req class one student said, “You’re really using your brain in this class. You’re not just sitting there like listening to a lecture. You’re working the whole time, so I don’t even think you realize it’s a three-hour class.” And several students all agreed that having freedom helped them become better writers. “This is the first class where I actually got it and I learned to write.” Another said, “I enjoyed revising. I find myself completely submerged when I revise, and I make it so much better than my first draft.”

These responses along with the written essay components that I examined offered me interesting and telling insight into how some students perceive of learning. However, I also found some of this initial data collection to be limiting. Along with some agreeable feedback I also received the opposed specifically during the focus group sessions. And because of how I had initially integrated the reflective writing assignments I found student responses to be at times manufactured and performative. In some cases, I think that they were writing what they thought I wanted them to say.

In some ways, I didn’t find out exactly what I wanted in the way I was hoping. But as academics we all know that this is a good place to be in that it was a starting point and I am now thinking about a separate kind of data collection that will help me unearth a different set of responses that in some way may correlate back to these written reflections. Time will tell. In the meantime, at the end of this spring semester I look forward to reading through another set of responses that may look a bit different and will continue to help me rethink the method and limitations of my own teaching and writing and reflective process. I wanted to end with some student reflections because I believe their voices are the reason why I continue the challenging work we all do: According to Martha’s post survey she said her experiences in the ENG 012/ENG 101 class were “Different. Through this course I have done self-reflection based on the topics we wrote about and it helped me develop as a person.” And I will end with a student I’ll call Lena: “Throughout this whole semester I felt as I have become a better writer, but more importantly a better student. I have really met some awesome and very helpful friends along the way who have also made this semester more enjoyable and a bit less stressful. I managed to really learn a lot from my professors and my peers on how to improve my writing and work ethic. I am very thankful I got to be a part of the ENG 012 program. I felt it really helped me in one semester more than all 4 years of high school and our professor was a tremendous help as well. I felt honored to be in this program.”

**Return to Activity:** Looking over your definition or inclusion of reflective writing again how could you include or revise an existing low or high stakes reflective writing assignment that would help students unearth one aspect of their writing process? How can this writing assignment that you create develop a method for students to use to determine the origin or nature of their writing process?